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Samuel R. Delany How Not to Teach Science Fiction

A lyrically written, brilliantly observed, and deeply moving tale appeared in *Galaxy Science Fiction* in 1955: Theodore Sturgeon's "Hurricane Trio." Later the same year Groff Conklin anthologized it in that astonishing collection of Sturgeon fantasy and science fiction entertainments, *A Way Home*.

"Hurricane Trio" may well provide an interesting critical laboratory in which to explore some of the things science fiction does—because Paul Williams, who interviewed Sturgeon extensively in the 1970s, once mentioned that Sturgeon did not originally write the story as science fiction. For a year or more, presumably, a manuscript of that title by Sturgeon made its way around among the various mid-century slick magazines. Since his first appearance in 1939 with "Ether Breather," Sturgeon had created quite an astonishing name for himself with the sf field; there, he was the writers' writer, the poet of the genre, the man whom even that far more popular but far less subtle writer, Ray Bradbury, had paid homage to; he was, in James Blish's words, "the most consummate artist science fiction has yet produced."

Some of the events in science fiction of the early fifties?

Due to an eccentric review by Christopher Isherwood in *The Saturday Review of Literature*, Bradbury had come to the attention of a far wider and more discerning circle of readers than he'd commanded during the forties. In the late forties, Heinlein had begun to place stories in *The Saturday Evening Post*, and from the attention that had accrued to him he had become one of the prime creative forces on the film, *Destination Moon*. And while Heinlein and Bradbury were indubitably interesting and important in the field (both, thanks to the attention they received, were to become even more so), both were markedly inferior to Sturgeon as writers. And one can be fairly sure Sturgeon knew it. The question could well have been, then: Could the most consummate artist sf had yet produced sell a story to *Harper's*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *The Atlantic*?

If this was indeed the case, here is a reasonable reconstruction of the opening of a non-sf version of "Hurricane Trio," as best we can manage without the original manuscript to go by:

Yancey lay very still with his arm flung across the pillow, and watched the moonlight play with the color of Beverly's hair. Her hair was spilled over his shoulder and chest and her body pressed against him, warm. He wondered if she was asleep. He wondered if she could sleep, with that moon-swept riot of surf going on outside the hotel. The waves blundered into the cliff below, hooting through the sea-carved boulders, frightening great silver ghosts of spray out and up into the torn and noisy air. He wondered if she could sleep with her round, gentle face so near his thumping heart. He wished the heart would quiet itself—subside at least to the level of the storm outside, so that she might mistake it for the same storm. He wished he could sleep; it might quiet his heart.

Beverly, Beverly, he cried silently, you don't deserve this! He wished the bed were larger, so that he might ease away

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In this issue

Samuel R. Delany provides today's lesson in the improper instruction of science fiction

Joan Slonczewski looks into *An Alien Light*

Alexei and Cory Panshin discuss L. Sprague de Camp, John W. Campbell, and some universal principles

Responses from L. Sprague de Camp, Gordon R.

Dickson, Larry Niven, and George Turner to the

search for science fiction's lost younger generation

Bruce Sterling looks at the highs and lows of Zenith

Plus—need we say it?—much more

Joan Slonczewski The Central Paradox in *An Alien Light* by Nancy Kress

New York: Avon Books, April, 1989; \$3.50 pb; 360 pp.

A lost colony survives on an inhospitable planet with a daylength three times longer than Earth. Survivors have founded two warring cities, Delysia and Jela. Delysia is a city of artisans and traders, Jela of warriors, honor, and physical discipline; their rivalry evokes the ancient conflict of Athens and Sparta. Unknown to them, the Ged, a nonhuman race in danger of extermination by starving humans, has made this lost colony the subject of a deadly experiment. The question the Ged seek to answer, the "Central Paradox," is this: how had a race so violent as humankind managed to reach the stars before self-destruction?

The question of surviving our own self-destruction is a compelling theme for writers about the future, or perhaps for anyone who has ever looked up into the night sky and wondered why no visitors have yet arrived. Is overgrown intelligence always doomed, like the monstrous size of the dinosaurs? The very act of writing an answer at least provides for us, if only in our imagination, a world that beats the odds. In *An Alien Light*, this theme has inspired a thoughtful and well written book, one to be enjoyed for its rich characterization despite serious conceptual flaws.

The depth of characterization comes across in the two women who first appear: the glassblower Ayras, cast out of Delysia for shaping a forbidden Jelite symbol in glass, seeking help from the mysterious walled city of the Ged; and the Jelite warrior Jehane, seeking miraculous weapons from the Ged. The fates of the two women become entangled despite their distrust and hatred, and layers of truth are revealed, as when Ayras observes, "Even if the cities are enemies until the end of time itself, no city can own a shape made of matter and air." Later, when large numbers of Jelites and Delysians have entered the Ged Wall, forced to live together unaware of their subjection to the Ged experiment, other interesting relationships emerge. The healer Dahar, another Jelite warrior, faces an impossible conflict between his code of a warrior and his longing for learning; later, to his surprise, he faces a

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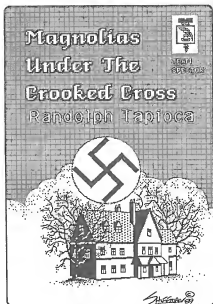
**New from Team Spector —
MAGNOLIAS UNDER THE
CROOKED CROSS, a novel by
Randolph Tapioca (author of
CYBERQUAX)**

"Miss Victoria sighed, and took another sip of her lemonade. Truly, the heat weighed on her the absolute heaviest here, in the old mansion house of Melisande Plantation.

'By dad-golly, Beulah, this summer since the nazy-men come is the hottest in my young life. Still, don't worry none, I won't let them take that nice little Mr. Ginzberg from where I got him hid. I promise you, Beulah, that no one takes a Southron lady, and a lady out of the Beaumarchais and Talbot families, and her property rights for granted.' She nodded to herself about that. That Sturmbannfuhrer Erich von Linebacker, and all his blond good looks, would find that Victoria Eugenie Slaughter had more backbone than all of those sweating weaklings in Richmond, sitting in the Confederate Congress and the 'Grey House', who had ratified the Treaty of Co-existing Mutually.

Beulah meowed, allowed as that might be so but that the Europeans had a lot of Panzer tanks occupying the territories north of the Chesapeake...and could she have her dinner now?"

The first time I met Randolph Tapioca was at the post-"Nebs" party shortly after his SYRINGES OF EFFLUVIA had appeared in paperback. I picked him up off the floor after he finished speaking with Tom Disch, and he thanked me and asked me to call him "Fritz". Thus are professional friendships begun. I saw him next at the Worldcon in Atlanta, shortly before his CYBERQUAX lost the Hugo for best novel.



I helped him compose himself after discussing the field with Jerry Pournelle, and managed to mop up most of the drink soaking Fritz's jacket. That was when he first told me about the story idea that would become the newest of his controversial novels, MAGNOLIAS UNDER THE CROOKED CROSS. When the manuscript first arrived, I was simply blown away. My assistant, Lilith, fainted dead away, and Mariah in promotion had to be rushed to St. Vincent's with an asthma attack (and is now doing just fine on her return from Arizona). I am pleased to announce that Team Spector is bringing you the most innovative concept in novelistic contrivances since Hugo Gernsback himself graduated from baby-mush to schnitzel. It's a great day for the science fiction field and Team Spector and Fountain Books.

**A Word from Tim Spector and
Your Pals at TEAM
SPECTOR/FOUNTAIN**



The books Americans read.

far more serious conflict between his learning and his existence as a human being.

The character of the two cities, Delysia and Jela, poses a dramatic contrast suggestive of Carol Gilligan's dissection of two different ways of knowing, in *A Different Voice*. The approach of the Delysians is immediate and contextual, expressed as a willingness to make any sort of "trade" out of practical necessity. For the Jelites, on the other hand, every human exchange must fit an abstract code of honor. The advantage of the Delysian way is its adaptability to change, its recognition of common sense, its robustness in the face of seeming paradox. The advantage of the Jelites is their moral consistency, which they maintain despite the seemingly ridiculous consequences. The author successfully balances these two approaches, and their cross-fertilization produces scenes of much interest.

Within the city groups, each character has individual differences which cross lines unexpectedly. Each of the major characters projects a family history: Ayrys's daughter taken from her, Dalar's stern father, the whore SuSu's mother. This attention to family, so often neglected by writers, goes a long way toward bringing out the characters in three dimensions. Even the minor characters are sketched with complexity, as when Dalar observes his angry commander "waver between curiosity and punishment" in her deciding how to discipline him. In another scene the three Jelite whores, Palonli, Jamila and SuSu, in a few sentences demonstrate dramatically different views of their profession.

The women characters are strong and drive the action to a major extent. In the middle section of the plot, as Dalar increasingly leads the Jelites and Delysians to work together for the sake of learning the God's science, the plot threatens to turn into a romance where the intellectually superior "number-rational" man saves the situation and wins Ayrys besides. The conclusion, however, neatly turns this plot on its head, as the quest of Ayrys and SuSu to rescue their trapped friends exposes the profound danger of Dalar's unquestioned pursuit of science. Ayrys makes her point, without losing the good that science does have to offer.

The author's interest in biology is welcome, particularly in her

depictions of unusual plant life on the planet Qom. She also depicts effectively the excitement of her characters learning science from the God. Unfortunately, the authenticity of her science does not equal that of her characters.

A major point is made of the "alien light," that is the daylength (and perhaps solar type) which determines the light experienced by the humans. The God somehow have determined that the "biological pattern" of humans is designed for precisely sixteen hours of light and eight of darkness. In fact, however, experiments have shown this is not the case. Humans enclosed away from clocks, allowed to choose their own periods of light or darkness, will gradually lengthen their days to as much as two or three times the "normal" twenty-four-hour cycle. Furthermore, even Earth's "natural" hours and intensity of daylight vary with season and latitude, and our physiology adapts readily. Northern peoples are accustomed to sleeping mainly at night, whereas southern peoples take an afternoon "siesta" during the heat and stay up into the night.

Another important plot twist involves the search for an antibiotic to cure a skin disease. In Dalar's test tubes, cloudy with supposed "bacteria," the antibiotics fail to kill the causative agent of the disease because it is not a bacterium but a virus. First, this "virus" could not be grown in a test tube of water; it would require a culture of healthy skin cells to lyse. Even if it were grown in this way, it would cause clearing of the tube, not clouding. This is an important point to understand. In the age of AIDS the reason why antibiotics do not work for viruses is that most of viral activity is actually host cell activity; thus, any antibiotic effective against viral growth would kill the patient, too. (Ultimately, it is found that certain kinds of light cure the skin virus. This is plausible; some skin diseases are in fact cured by ultraviolet rays. Too bad AIDS is not a skin disease.)

The most serious conceptual difficulty lies in Kress's distinction between species which practice "intraspecies violence" (as do humans) and those which do not (the God). The violence of the former is attributed to genetic diversity, the cooperation of the latter is due to "little variance among their genes." There are several problems here.

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Kathryn Cramer, Features Editor; L. W. Currey, Contributing Editor;

Samuel R. Delany, Contributing Editor; David G. Hartwell, Reviews Editor.

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Read This

Read and Recommended by Michael D. Weavers

Dr. Bloodmoney by Philip K. Dick. Since I tend to read little sf in general, and even less of recent issue, this is the best I can do to top the list. A re-read, actually.

The Sheep Look Up by John Brunner. A marvelous, multi-faceted classic which I was encouraged to read by a reviewer.

The Penultimate Truth by Philip K. Dick. If you'll forgive the double Dick recommendation. . . . This is it for recently read sf.

Woman of the Dunes by Kobo Abe. A Japanese variation on Kafkaesque themes. Brilliantly told.

One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel García Márquez. Magic realism at its finest.

The Book of Laughter and Forgetting by Milan Kundera. I'm tempted to recommend all of Kundera's writing, though this one impressed me the most. An "homage to the technique of variation," by the author's description.

Music for Chameleons by Truman Capote. Some of the most perfect short stories I've ever read, feeling to me much more like a novel. Puts *In Cold Blood* into the back journalism category in comparison.

Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass by Bruno Schultz. A collection of tales addressing the magic and mysteries of childhood, remarkable for Schultz's dazzling linguistic gymnastics, even more amazing in that this was translated from Polish.

Process and Perception by Jerry Uelsmann. Photographic manipulations of reality that must be seen to be believed.

Secrets of the Beehive by David Sylvian. To be truthful, this is a recording, though many of the lyrics are like three-minute shorts. If you're going to read any of the above, you may as well have something decent to listen to.

First, it is not clear what biological models Kress has in mind. Species may be passive or aggressive, regardless of genetic diversity. Some animals exist together in large herds for periods of time, then engage in fierce competition for mates. Many species, particularly plants, engage in nothing that we normally perceive as "violence," yet they pursue a deadly silent competition for available space and nutrients.

If we focus on cooperation as a positive attribute, rather than the absence of violence, we can see many examples of intra- as well as interspecific cooperation. Intraspecific cooperation involves mutualism: birds that eat ticks off of hippopotami, algae feeding bacteria to form lichen. Intraspecific cooperation usually correlates with genetic relatedness: if I help my sister hatch enough eggs, I might do better than if I lay my own. The degree of relatedness required for measurable cooperation is surprisingly low, perhaps twenty-five percent in bird species.

The most elaborate systems of cooperation are the colonies of social insects, such as bees, ants, and termites. Within a beehive, thousands of bees work together, sharing an incredibly complex array of tasks; they "sing in harmony," like the Geds. Yet even among the bees, there are crucial moments of violence: the worker bees kill an aging queen; a newly hatched queen destroys her queenly sister larvae in their cells; drones who mate successfully are torn apart by the act.

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Recent research suggests that even the daily cooperation of workers masks a subtle competitive favoritism for larvae of greater relatedness. "Cooperation," at remarkably high levels, does not exclude violence and competition.

Perhaps the relatively small degrees of violence within a beehive may be overlooked, or extrapolated away in an invented species such as the Geds. But what are we to make of the fierce competition between beehives of the same species? A conspecific bee who dares to enter a hive as a stranger is swiftly expelled, or torn to pieces. Under normal conditions (that is, when a functional queen is present) separate colonies of bees treat each other as strangers, even where high relatedness exists.

Are all of the Geds a single colony? What function does their communal "mating" serve; its mechanism is never clearly defined. Is there no mutation rate to generate diversity, and hence cause subgroups of the colony to diverge over time? Was there never causal isolation and divergence, on their home planet?

The problem deepens when we examine how the Geds approach other like-minded "cooperative" species whom they encounter among the stars:

The Geds tried always to arrange treaties with such species, although when their species territorially proved as strong as the Geds's, this sometimes proved impossible and war became necessary. The Geds always regretted it, and their pheromones smelled of lament for the Oneness of the lost species.

Where did the Geds learn about "treaties," "territoriality," and "war," if not through conflict within their own species?

The very definition of "species," and distinction among "subspecies," is the source of much healthy debate among ecologists. One thing is clear: all of today's "species" arose from preexisting subgroups of a single species, some of whom outcompeted others. If the Geds lack competition now, where did they lose it, and what is the source of their drive to the stars? For the reviewer, this is the "central paradox" of Kress's story.

For the Geds, the Central Paradox is the survival of the human race despite their "intraspecific" violence. During their experiment, the Geds puzzle over the shifting treacheries and alliances among the Delystans and Jelites, expressing the same perplexity and distaste that Plato did watching Athens and Sparta. (Plato's imagined Republic was something the Geds might admire.) They reach a conclusion, which they consider unique to humans.

Through violence, the superior minds, carrying the best technological ideas, can leave one subspecies and sing in harmony with another. . . . Thus, in a violent species, violence aids collective intelligence.

This sifting and coalescing of the "superior minds" supposedly enables humans to advance their technology to the stars. But what does it leave behind? How does it prevent self-destruction?

The key "data" on which the Geds base their conclusion appears to be the ultimate alliance of four central characters, arguably the most intelligent of the humans: the healer and would-be scientist Dalar; the glassblower Ayrys, also gifted in science; the clever warrior Jehane; and the former worker Susu, the first to figure out how to breach the Geds' Wall. What the Geds fail to notice is that these four share not only exceptional intelligence, relative to the others, but also exceptional good will. Dalar is willing to heal anyone, Jelites or Delystans; Jehane repeatedly rescues Ayrys, despite her graphic loathing of the "Delystian slug." But what becomes of us humans when intelligence and goodwill are not joined in the same person?

This dilemma is not unique to humans, although in humans it finds its most extreme expression. Konrad Lorenz, in his classic *On Aggression*, sketches the link between violence and intelligence in a variety of animals. More recently, Richard Alexander develops a theoretical framework for its application to humans, in *The Biology of Moral Systems*. If violence aids intelligence, intelligence aids violence; and in humans, Alexander concludes, the spiral may be out of control. One hopes that, like most biologists, he's not completely right.

The "sunside" of all this, as the God would say, is that the positive force of cooperation can bring together small groups of committed individuals, like the four above, who (in an ironic twist) cooperate to escape the God. Robert Axelrod in *The Evolution of Cooperation* won the *Science* journal prize for mathematical models which show how a small group of cooperators can survive and prosper amidst a sea of hostile individuals. This may explain the persistence of peace groups in repressive societies as diverse as El Salvador and East Germany. A ray

of hope, yes—but no guarantee of survival to the stars.

Kress has written a book which should be enjoyed for its memorable characters and authentic portrayal of human relationships. Its intellectual framework, though flawed, does address important questions. I look forward to hearing more from her in the future. ▴

Joan Slonczewski's most recent novel is *The Wall Around Eden*. She lives in Gambier, Ohio and teaches biology at Kenyon College.

Generational Saga

Responses to Kathryn Cramer's article "The New Generation Gap"

This is the second installment of responses and comments occasioned by Kathryn Cramer's statistical study published in issue #11 of The New York Review of Science Fiction. This forum will be continued in the next issue. We particularly encourage writers under thirty to send us their dates of birth and the data concerning their first professional publications.

Only in the science fiction field would anyone worry that the writers aren't young enough!

—John D. Berry
Seattle, Washington

I was born in New York City on November 27, 1907. This makes me one of the two or three oldest old-timers still producing science fiction and fantasy. In 1937 I wrote my first commercial story, "The Isolungs," at the age of 29. In the same year I sold it and saw it published in the September 1937 *Asimovian*. Before that I had been employed as a writer-for-hire by a correspondence school (a textbook) and a trade journal (articles on air conditioning). I had been a writer for, and editor of, my college weekly, *The California Tech*. I had also made a couple of tentative attempts at short stories, but I daresay they were so dreadful that I am happy that no copies survive.

In 1939 I began full-time freelance writing. Save for a couple of temporary jobs and a three-and-a-half year hiatus during the Hitlerian War, I have been at it ever since and am still going strong.

As for Ms. Cramer's suggestions: First I should say that readers' ages have jiggled up and down like a spectrograph, depending on the ages that the leading writers of the time most appealed to. Before 1914, we have no solid statistics on the ages of readers of such popular writers of science fiction as Mary Shelley, Mark Twain, Jules Verne, or H. G. Wells. Therefore we can only guess, applying present-day criteria, from the study of their respective works what age groups would most like their works. Some like L. Frank Baum appealed primarily to children. Some like Wells appealed more to adults. Some like Lewis Carroll and Edgar Rice Burroughs beguiled a broad spectrum of ages.

I suspect that a substantial youthening of science fiction writers took place in the 1920s, when the florescence of the pulp magazines and of the science fiction pulps in particular provided an expanded market for short stories. In an earlier decade, many young would-be writers could not have started because the available slots in the field were already occupied by mature authors like Wells and Doyle, with whom most fledgling writers could not compete. Since the pulps in general and the science fiction pulps in particular did not require a high degree of literary polish and sophistication, beginning writers gravitated to them. The aristocrats of the pulps, such as *Adventure Magazine* and *Blue Book*, made higher demands than most. In the late 1920s and early 30s, Robert E. Howard was quite successful in selling stories to the low-paying *Weird Tales* and to the sport and Western pulps. He longed to break into *Adventure* and the other quality pulps but never succeeded, being unable to compete with such accomplished and experienced writers as Harold Lamb and Talbot Mundy.

But Time, as that magazine's radio program used to say, marches on. The eager but unskilled young pulp writers of the 1920s became older and either dropped out or sharpened their writing skills.

The publishing field has seen spasmodic expansions and contractions

of the fiction market. One expansion occurred in the so-called Golden Age of 1938-41, when a score of short-lived science fiction magazines were launched, only to perish in a few years to oversaturation of the market and wartime shortages. (The de Camps think it were better called a Copper Age, since the prevailing rate was a penny a word.)

A similar expansion happened in the late 1940s and early 50s, followed by the demise of most of the two dozen magazines of imaginative fiction published at the maximum. In addition, the steady growth of the publication of paperbacked books after 1945 created an expanding market for science fiction novels. After the revival of adult fantasy in the middle 1960s, with the paperback publication of J. R. R. Tolkien and Robert E. Howard's Conan stories, this sub-genre grew even faster than science fiction proper.

Each such expansion, I infer, brought in a lot of young aspirant writers hastening to fill the slots that opened to them. In addition, established writers in other genres tried their hands at imaginative fiction; sometimes they did well at it and sometimes not. Then, as inevitably happened, the market stabilized or shrank. The writers who had secured a firm foothold in it aged, becoming the "older generation" standing in the way of a new crop of young would-be-ers. We may expect similar surges in market outlets to have similar effects in the future.

As for a generational gap between writers and their readers, the mere fact of being young does not guarantee that a writer can better appeal to those of his own generation than one older. After all, Lewis Carroll was in his early thirties when he wrote *Alice in Wonderland*. Edgar Rice Burroughs was in his late thirties when he composed *A Princess of Mars* and *Tarzan of the Apes*. L. Frank Baum was in his forties when he wrote *The Wizard of Oz*.

On the whole, even if a generational gap exists between writers and readers, it means nothing in practical terms. The only exception is when an irrational craze sweeps through the youth of the nation, as it does from time to time (like the fad for psychedelic drugs that began in the 1960s) some young writers may achieve ephemeral success by professing to share the same fad with their readers. Older writers do the same sort of thing. They are either converted to the vogue, as John W. Campbell was converted to Dianetics, ESP, and other vagaries in his last decades, or are permitted by an elastic conscience to profess such a belief when they actually do not, as Raymond A. Palmer did with Shaver's Deros.

As for writing for twelve-year-olds, so long as there are literate twelve-year-olds who create a market for writings aimed at that age group, there will be writers who, seeing a chance to make a living by writing for that market, do so; young writers, old writers, whoever has the particular talent for creating fiction irresistible to readers of that age.

The term "maturity" is hardly applicable in a significant way to a genre of fiction. It is a truism that younger writers tend to be more easily creative and facile in writing, with more original ideas, while older ones are more critical, more alert to mistakes and inconsistencies, and have a more realistic grasp of human nature and behavior. As Aristotle said: "The young readily trust others, because they have not yet often been cheated."

We may if we like call the more skeptical, disillusioned views of older persons more "mature" than those of younger colleagues; but that is simply the normal human growth pattern. As T. H. White wrote in *The Once and Future King*, "There is a thing called knowledge of the world, which people do not have until they are middle-aged. It is something

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which cannot be taught to younger people, because it is not logical and does not obey laws which are constant. It has no rules."

But for all these matters of the age of writers and their readers even out in the long run. With the advance of medical science, people live longer. Thus, while the writers as a whole get older, so do the readers. Imagine what the world would be like if science lengthened the active human life span five or ten-fold! Would there be a generation gap between 500-year-olds and mere centenarians?

—L. Sprague de Camp,
Plano, Texas

I don't doubt these statistics. Though I find them a little surprising, I can find arguments to justify them.

After all, there's a curve Kathryn Cramer has not included: the expansion of readership throughout these sixty-six years. You can see the field pulse when a Russian goes into orbit, an American lands on the Moon, *Star Trek* or *Star Wars* hits the screen. New readers suspect they should be reading science fiction: it's suddenly become more real to them. Half of them grab the wrong book and we lose them... but the graph never contracts back to its earlier level.

My mother read a story that I didn't write, once. She looked down the Table of Contents of a *Nebula Awards* volume, found a title that appealed to her, and read "A Boy and His Dog" by Harlan Ellison. After that, forget it. I might just as well have tried to smoke my pipe in her house.)

The readership has expanded, so the field pays more; so the established writer can survive better; so he can work harder on his next book; which makes it more valuable, more lucrative.

And the novice writer is unable to compete. A beginning science fiction writer is expected to know more and write better. He must go further in school, at least far enough to have mastered one subject, he needs more contact with the rest of his culture and society and species, to shape his characters better; and he needs to have read a good deal, particularly of science fiction, so that he won't be constantly re-inventing the hyperdrive. That takes time!

Could it be true of fantasy too? Yes, it could, because fantasy sells better too. Readers (and reviewers) have come to expect the author to know something about horses, housing, weaponry, politics, whatever forms the backgrounds for their stories.

It's hard to believe that "Doc" Smith used to be considered a hard science fiction writer. He wasn't just good enough, he nearly owned the field, though he doesn't seem to have known about relativity until late in life.

The age of the novice has been increasing since the beginning, except for an interesting bump in the curve. I note that in 1956-1965, the number of writers who sold their first stories in their teens more than doubles. It then drops back to less than half. 1956-1965 was early New Wave... when anyone could get away with any kind of sloppiness, and call it innovative plotting and creative typography.

Science fiction readers are older too? That's interesting. I fear Greg Benford is right: the young can't read. That may be the real explanation for the loss of young writers too.

I've always written for an imaginary reader a whole lot like Larry Niven, though he needs things explained to him. And Larry Niven is getting older. I just wrote my first *Known Space* short story in fifteen years... and it's set mostly in a *gray singles bar*.

If too many of our stories are being written for older readers, the only solution I can think of is to stop writing. And I won't.

—Larry Niven,
Tarzana, California

Born: December 30, 1950.

First professional sale: "Tinker's Dams" to *Galileo* (written in June of '74). Acceptance letter (provisional) dated November 9, 1976. I was still 25—barely.

(This is not counting poems in the local paper in sixth-grade, winning \$25 first prize from (and publication in) *Our Generation*, a Dallas area magazine for teenagers, in 1968; or pseudonymous fiction

(as "Hank Fjord") in the fanzine *Tales From Texas*.

(I sold a second story (mystery) just over a month after the *Galileo* sale (informed by phone call December 27, 1976). The magazine folded before the story was published, and it was July of '78 before I sold another story; that was to *Shayol*, a semiprozine (not recognized by SFWA, but a paying market). I sold a couple of mystery stories to *Mike Shayne*; my next actual sale to a real professional market was to *PSF* (letter dated April 18, 1980—published in the April '81 issue). This was the point at which I actually began to publish regularly.)

First professional publication: *Galileo* #5, October 1977 (approximately).

First novel sold: *Frontiera*, December, 1983.

First novel published: August, 1984.

...

Why are all writers getting older?

1) Competition from other art forms. My parents didn't have a TV (till I was 6 or 7, by which time I was already a print junkie. Kids these days have TV, video games, etc. from birth.

2) The baby boom. The average age you give for the "new" generation of SF writers is the age of the average baby boomer. Maybe we just outnumber everybody else. Or maybe we're the last generation interesting in writing at all, and the few new writers showing up are just anomalies.

3) No room at the top. For every new writer who breaks in, there go three or four (on the average) slots per year in what few markets we have. Markets are not increasing: "name" pros are. Though if editors pride themselves on being open to new authors, this is a lie. They would much rather buy some old piece of crap out of my trunk than something by a name they don't recognize. This is not entirely mercenary: editors literally read a story differently if it's by a writer whose name they know. I don't understand this, but I've seen it happen too many times not to know it's true. I used to be on the losing end of this truth; I'm now on the winning end, but I still don't like it.

It's probably at least a little of all of the above. The only one we can do anything about is number three. Editors, don't buy a piece of crap just because it has Asimov's name on it—or Shepard's or Sterling's or Shiner's, for that matter. If you read a story by somebody you've never heard of, and there's something going on you've never seen before, don't assume it's a mistake. Hell, maybe it's the beginning of a movement.

NYRFS is not the first to notice this phenomenon. I said something to Lucius Shepard a while back about not knowing who the hot young writers were anymore. Lucius said, "Uh, I think we still are." My reply was, "God help us."

—Lewis Shiner,
Austin, Texas

I've thought for some time that there has been a change in the field, that it is harder to break in and so the age of "new writers" is rising. First the basic info:

I was born September 26, 1950.

I published a non-af story in a little magazine called the *Cottonwood Review* in the Winter 1974 issue (Dec. 1974). I don't consider this a pro sale since I wasn't paid for it.

I sold my first af story to an anthology called *Black Holes*, edited by Scott Edelman, on March 28, 1975. The publishing company went out of business and although I was paid, the story never appeared. A later version of this story was published as "The Pure Product" in the March 1985 *Asimov's*.

My first story to be both paid for and published was "The Silver Man," which appeared in *Galileo* #8 in May 1978, when I was 27 years old.

In other ways my career has followed the standard format. I sold a lot of short stories in the three or four years after that. *Galileo* sale and eventually wrote a novel with Jim Kelly that was published in 1985. My first solo novel, *Good News From Outer Space*, should be out in August.

of this year. I think my progress has been a lot slower than some other writers', probably because I don't write very fast.

As far as reaction goes, I'm not sure it's anything to get panicked about that we see fewer 19-year-olds breaking into *sf* (Watch out for Joe Gangemi, though—his first story is in the second *Full Spectrum*. At the age of 16 he was at the Clarion I taught in '86, and was in my opinion the most naturally gifted writer there). In my experience the average 20-year-old hasn't seen or thought or done enough to handle fiction writing very well, though I readily admit that good fiction has been written by prodigies. At 20 certainly wasn't a very good writer, and the stories I was submitting to the *sf* mags were terrible. Also, have you looked at the book racks lately? There's plenty of fiction for teenagers being written by 35-year-olds. In my *sf* classes I see lots of young people who are hooked on *sf*, and most of them never give a thought to the age of the authors of the books they love. You seem to be suggesting that books for teenagers have to be written by young writers. This has never been the case. If there's cause for worry in this situation I think it's at the reading end, not the writing—I think fewer young people today are "hooked on books" than were in the 50s and 60s. This has nothing to do with the age of the writers, and everything to do with the media culture we've developed in the last 30 years.

So if I had to vote, I'd say the increasing age of new writers in *sf* is a sign of at least potentially increased maturity in *sf*—at least at one end of the market. The kind of fiction published under the rubric "sf" covers a much broader range of quality and intention than in 1950, I think. For good and ill, *sf* is less homogeneous than it used to be.

—John Kessel,
Raleigh, North Carolina

My birth date is 28 August 1948. I sold my first story in early 1969, some time before my 21st birthday. (I'm certain of that because I threw myself a 21st birthday party at the St. Louis WorldCon, and used the \$75 check I got for the story to pay for it.)

—Vonda N. McIntyre,
Seattle, Washington

First, the data asked for:

Date of birth: 8 Oct 1916

First professional sale (mainstream): 1958

First professional sale (science fiction): 1978

Science Fiction Then, Now and Hereafter

Kathryn Cramer's dissection of age groups (*NYR&F*, July, 1989) holds a certain morbid interest for those of us who have been reading science fiction for a lifetime (I began at about age 8, two years before the first issue of *Amazing Stories* laid me panting in the aisles), but in fact tells us little of what happened in and to the field. The statistical attack produces questions but the answers lie in what has happened to society since 1926.

Before discussing this aspect myself, I must pose some answers to her final list of questions before my replies will background my ideas of what has happened.

1. Will science fiction become a literature by 35-year-olds for 35-year-olds? It is tempting to ask in return: Would that matter? However, the polite answer is that science fiction will continue to find new niches for all ages of writer and reader. I think there will always be a magazine-fed mass product, as there is in every other popular genre, but many writers will continue to seek new methods and a broader public.

2. Will this alienate the 12-year-olds? Of course not; the popular yarn will always be around for them to find.

3. Should science fiction writers try to write for 12-year-olds? Aside from the existence of a stratum of writers who do it without trying, today's 12-year-olds are more sophisticated than we were in the Gernsback and even the Campbell days. They'll find what they want.

4. Will workshops raise the average age of new writers or lower it? They may raise it. Workshoping makes the aspiring writer aware of the need for quality and tends to delay his/her soliciting editorial attention for amateur efforts. But there will always be the star-struck under-21s

to do just that—and quite often bring it off.

5. Is the new reader/new writer generation gap a problem to be solved? No. Is it a sociological adjustment which will settle itself without interference from anyone. Trying to alter it might well cause a few publishing bankruptcies through misreading of the fairly obscure dues.

6. Is this a sign of science fiction's maturity or its demise? Neither. No genre ever reaches maturity. Genre work is literary adolescence; maturity comes when the writer escapes genre requirements and moves into a more demanding mode of literary and intellectual attack. Tom Diech and J. G. Ballard spring at once to mind as successful escapees. Others with similar ambitions (no names, no new enemies) cannot rise above the genre habits which have become second nature to them. There will be no demise, only a temporary occultation by the appalling flood of third rate fantasy and 'science fiction' that should be termed fantasy. Science fiction will continue to move further into the mainstream and pick up a new, possibly older readership as writers with broader literary interests see that its techniques and concerns can be adapted to intentions deeper than simple entertainment.

Such easy predictions do not rest on statistics but on a social phenomenon—the enormous change that has taken place in the relationship between science and the general public since 1926.

Hugo Gernsback could feed pap to his audience because his audience knew little science: beyond High School Phys and Chem. A chemical reaction and the names of the moons of Saturn were sufficient to bug the eyes and make the story science fiction. The realities were totally beyond the dreamers. You think I exaggerate? Turn back to the magazines and find 'atomic' power produced on the laboratory workbench, super-brains grown with the prick of a syringe, spacecraft funded by a lone backyard engineer—and built in his backyard, too. . . .

Hiroshima, space flight and nuclear power plants put science into the daily news. Hi-fi and computers put it into the home. What science was doing became news, part of our daily lives, not stuffing space opera. Australia's Minister for Science began urging that "we must all become technologically literate", but he was already behind the times. AIDS, 'test tube' babies, the ozone layer, the greenhouse effect and the population threat were suddenly all about us, so we need also to become biologically literate. Which means also sociologically literate. A properly responsible science fiction can do some quietly effective groundwork in those areas.

Importantly, science has become a familiar thing (hence, possibly, the rise of sword 'n sorcery for the refusers of reality) and science fiction has had to take notice of the fact. You can't feed an eternity of space opera to people who have become accustomed to a science column in their daily newspaper or to finding authoritative information couched in layman-oriented language in *New Scientist*.

Science fiction had to take note of a science as an integral part of everyday life. It is no longer a thing apart. It has direct social impact.

To write stories that will appeal to a science-conscious public, adventure and prediction of marvels is not enough. The public knows all the predictions; it is more concerned with realities as the real world shrinks round it—realities of vanishing forests, polluted water, dangerous air, disappearing species, psychotic behaviour patterns—and in what science can do about them.

Writing the stories these people want and need involves life experience, knowledge of human beings in many different conditions, of social change and what it does to the changed, of tides of thought that further split an already split world, of the heart and the mind and the impulses that determine ideas of right and wrong.

Such knowledge is hard come by. That is why the major science fiction writers (not necessarily the most popular) are middle-aged or elderly. They have at last learned enough to put their long apprenticeship to work.

And so:

J. G. Ballard writes *Crash*, *Concrete Island* and *High Rise* about the neuroses of close-packed city dwellers—

Michael Bishop writes *Ancient of Days* to encapsulate his perspectives on racism and alienation—

Rodney Hall writes *Kisses of the Enemy* about how your country can be bought from under you—

Stanislaw Lem writes *Fiasco* to demonstrate the inability of intelli-

gence to outgrow the idiot possibilities of a complacent technology—

John Updike writes *Roger's Version* (possibly the most hard-science-saturated novel of the century) to ask questions about religion and the confusions of the common man.

The list of novels not much read by the genre science fiction reader but sought out by the mainstream public could go on and on; there are more of them every year. And every year more of them are being written by mainstream writers who are trying to see what the world is doing with science and what an exponentially expanding science is doing to us.

There will always be magazines, space opera and enthusiastic young writers. Their grandfathers built the platform from which a real science fiction has finally taken off; they will preserve the platform for new generations to climb aboard.

I see that Ms. Cramer bewails the "disappearance of the teenage writer." No need; he is still writing but finding it harder to get published than in 1926-1950. The field has matured and so must he in order to enter it. Much of today's science fiction is receiving attention in the world outside fandom and that matters more than the relative ages of the fathers and grandfathers who have learned, the hard way, to write it.

—George Turner
Victoria, Australia

It seems to me a great pity to get into such a stew over nothing. Every time I pick up one of those copies of *Locus* with the Poll Results, reporting only the crudest statistics possible, I wince to think of what information could be derived by careful analysis of the data. Charlie Brown has in his hands. But nothing ever gets done with it; does no one who reads these fanzines feel comfortable with numbers?

In the case of Kathryn's article, it's a different kettle of fish, for whatever might be the case about the age at which writers have their first works published, or the changing social climate in the period Kathryn investigated, the simple truth is that there's no statistical difference between the age distributions of the writers for the six periods from 1926, as anyone with college statistics should have been able to show. I enclose a quick-and-dirty check I did comparing the '26-'35 group with the '76-'85 group, and as you can see it is more than 99% sure that the two distributions came from the same population—i.e. that the differences reported by Kathryn are due to chance factors.

Kathryn's extensive pie charts fill up space, but they don't convey as much information as a simple table which would have shown just how small the seeming changes are. (I didn't make any comparisons using the pre-1926 figures, because I am a little uncertain, still, as to the definitions Kathryn used: if A. E. van Vogt first made money from his writing before he was 14, as she claims, then it wasn't for the kind of stuff that appeared in *Amazing*. Heavens, I was first paid for my writing before I was 14 (big circulation, the Melbourne Age had in those days, too), but I don't exactly include it in my CV.)

Now it may be that there are changes in the ages of beginning writers, but your extensive "evidence" doesn't show it.

I think it is sad that you have set this particular hare running, how about trying a flat-earth theory next time?

—John Foyster
Norwood, Australia

In the 1920s about the same fraction of people graduated from primary school (8th grade) as graduated High School in the 1940s. And that same proportion finishes university today. Each, in its day, was a badge that said—"all right, you're educated. Now maybe we'll listen to what you have to say, if you say it well."

So are new journeyman writers getting older? Big surprise! There's a biological term—neoteny—for when advanced life forms require longer childhoods. As has been getting more sophisticated, more "advanced" in a sense. So now our "youths" aren't ready to go pro 'til their hairlines are receding? Big deal. It's happening in every other worthwhile field of human endeavor. The solution, boys and girls, is to *think* forever young. Let's move on.

—David Brin
Los Angeles, California

I was born on April 5, 1917, which makes me well-over-forty 72 years old.

I made my first professional sale in July, 1934, and my first professional appearance in print on November 1, 1934 (W7's Jan. '35 issue, pubbed, as was their custom, two months ahead of the actual date).

That means I've been a pro for 55 years; long enough to know Fred Brown spelled his first name "Frederic."

I believe a lot more of today's readers will be 35-year-olds because it's taking youngsters about thirty years to learn how to read.

It follows that if my premise is correct, there won't be that much of a generation gap between future readers and future writers (if any of either group continue to exist in tomorrow's comic-TV-oriented world).

—Robert Bloch,
Los Angeles, California

Birthdate: December 24, 1910

First professional sale: August 1939 ("Two Sought Adventure" to *Unknown—Fantasy*).

First professional science fiction sale: August 1941 ("They Never Came Back" to *Future Fiction*).

First book publication: 1947 (*Adapt's Gambit*).

I learned fully half my science from science fiction and still find it useful to distinguish that field of fiction from horror, fantasy and other genres, recognizing the educational aspect of our profession.

I get the impression that nowadays new writers are more apt to begin their careers with novels rather than short stories. It was the case with my son Justin and several other younger writers I know. This being due, in considerable part, to the great growth of paperback publishing.

—Fritz Leiber
San Francisco, California

I find the argument that today's "youths" are not writing science fiction because of some failings of the U.S. educational system to be generally false. The current American educational system, in fact, has inhibited writers from selling at an early age by being so good.

A successful educational system will stimulate students, challenge and compelling them to work towards their limits. In short, a good education will make a student prove his/her abilities—good grades, high test scores, college acceptances, and college degrees being traditional indications of hard work and deep thought. Many of the most intelligent students will realize what benefits a good education offers, and consequently they will apply their talents towards their educations (talents that could also be applied towards artistic endeavors such as writing and selling science fiction stories). The degrees that they receive at the end of these educational paths will be more than just pieces of paper; the degrees are the hard-earned products of much effort. They *prove* something.

Consider, if you will, the science fiction novel. It requires an exceptional amount of knowledge, diligence, imagination, foresight, and communicative skills; I certainly consider it among the most challenging art forms. Can it be that people who undertake such difficult endeavors—that people who aspire to take the f world by storm—feel the need to prove how intelligent they are?

Fred Pohl brazenly told me in the Princeton University Student Center, "I don't think college has anything useful to teach you." David D. Ross, author of the forthcoming novel *The Argus Gambit* (a novel about a conspiracy of intelligentsia), asserts "I've had three years of college, but dropped out, mainly because I decided that universities have very little to teach a writer about his craft." Another young writer told me flatly that he was getting a college degree "In the easiest field I can," and asked me more than once why I bothered attending such a difficult school. Many other leading writers and editors never received a college degree. Many others.

It seems to me that today, when college educations—including educations at the universities considered most prestigious—are more accessible to middle-class people than ever before in American history,

fewer people need to prove their intelligence to everyone else. Consequently, fewer young people attempt to break through the walls of publishing. The educational system serves their needs. It challenges them.

Personally, I think this drive to show off one's smarts is typically adolescent—one of the most common ways for an adolescent to obtain equal status with an adult is to top the adult's intellectual level. This would explain in part why teens frequently read science fiction: by reading the most intelligent books, teen-agers can prove themselves worthy of adulthood. For science fiction to continue attracting young readers, science fiction need only continue producing the most intelligent and imaginative fiction of its time. The intelligent readers will find the books wherever they are.

—Gordon Van Gelder,
New York, New York

First published professionally 1966 (age 17)—first "sale" other than to my own magazine 1966—age 18.

—Paul Williams
Glen Ellyn, California

I should possibly disqualify myself, even though you asked for a comment, since I'm an agent and not a writer. But since I started out as a writer, and in fact broke myself in as a teenager (I sold my first work of fiction at 14-1/2, though to a mystery magazine rather than a science fiction magazine, and my first non-fiction sale was a few months earlier to a movie fan magazine) I'll be glad to comment.

This is just an educated guess, but, in my view, the fact that fewer young writers are trying to break into the sf field spells neither a sign of sf's maturity nor its demise, but, rather, an unhappy result (probably the only unhappy result) of the fact that sf has become so—well, let's call it so big-time. I think that young writers are just more frightened about trying to break in than the younger writers thirty and forty and fifty years ago.

Back in those days, of course, when many of our early clients like Arthur C. Clarke and Lester del Rey and Poul Anderson and all the others were just starting out, it wasn't quite as daunting to try to break in because the remuneration and the sales figures were very modest indeed. Virtually none of the big general publishers did science fiction novels; the few firms publishing sf, outfits like Gnome Press and Prime Press, were almost amateur operations run mostly by people who were fans, earned their real livelihood at other jobs, and paid advances in the neighborhood of one hundred dollars to five hundred dollars. The few science fiction magazines paid one cent to two cents a word, and some paid a half-cent or even a quarter-cent. Total sales and earned royalties were similarly small, so the writers in the field were equally small-time, and so a lot of young writers found the courage to try their hand at it because the competition didn't look all that tough and fearsome.

Today, of course, science fiction having come so strongly into its own—with writers like Arthur Clarke and Isaac Asimov receiving advances and earnings running into the millions of dollars, with science fiction novels by the best and most popular authors getting frequently onto the general fiction bestseller lists and sometimes achieving the Number One spot, with some science fiction movies garnering the biggest grosses of all—I think that many very young would-be writers are just too scared even to try to buck the awesome competition. And that's a shame, particularly since more and more very young readers aren't afraid to try reading science fiction.

Obviously, an author doesn't have to be in the same age group as his readership. Two of the most popular writers of all time for very, very young readers are Ted Geisel (Dr. Seuss) and Syd Hoff, both of whom are well into their Medicare years. On the other side of the coin, James Herriot didn't even start writing until he was fifty years of age, and his bestselling book of stories about dogs and cats and farm animals sold hugely to young readers as well as older readers. But I've always felt that the sooner a new author starts to try for publication the better; so I hope that, if my theory is correct or partly correct, new young writers will stop being chicken and start submitting.

—Scott Meredith,
New York, New York

Birthdate: 1950.

Age at first professional sale: 24 (*Seeklight*, Laser, 1975). However, the first novel that I ever wrote was written when I was 23, and it was published at a much later date (*Dr. Adder*, Bluejay, 1984).

—K. W. Jeter
Portland, Oregon

Received your circular, but I really have no ideas about the changing audience for, and practitioners of, sf. I only hope that any trend does not reflect the further descent of the United States into an abyss of superstitious ignorance, as exemplified by the educational system, the fundamentalist churches, the creationist lunatics, etc., etc.

I don't know what the answer is, either—I used to say that it will be a good thing if the occupant of the White House read science fiction instead of westerns or detectives. Unfortunately, as we all know, that's exactly what the last one did!

I enjoy the *Review*, though I simply don't believe that many of the books discussed actually exist. . . .

—Arthur C. Clarke
Colombo, Sri Lanka

For what it's worth, both the articles by the Panshins and the one by Kathryn Cramer are very, very good indeed. It is the work behind such essays as this that makes them worthwhile and in both cases the work is obvious.

[With regard to the Cramer article:] What strikes me most strongly about any kind of study like this is the problem that the field has changed so radically from a commercial and financial point of view since its beginnings before the nineteen twenties. Even as late as the post-World War II nineteen forties, it was possible to make a living from the field of pulp magazines.

That's no longer possible. In fact a beginning writer is extremely restricted as far as the spectrum of editors in the field go. There are so few that after three or four tries, a story may simply be put on the shelf. In addition, the magazine rates, even where they make an attempt to match up with what is paid in the book field generally, cannot begin to approach the kind of money that makes it worthwhile for any well-established author to take out from doing novels to write short stories.

Occasionally, some of us do it—unfortunately, I'm not one of them—those who do either do it for love of the short story and because they can afford to, with the earnings from the book field, or because they are natural short story writers. I should say, perhaps, writers of less than novel length.

What this all adds up to is that a new writer must plunge directly into the business of writing long pieces of fiction, without the seasoning that comes from doing the shorter pieces that come more naturally, as a poem comes more naturally in its brevity, and where the reader will be content to assume information that would need to be supplied in a book-length novel.

In addition, most of us who sold before we were twenty-one back in the time of the magazines had a large number who did it make their first professional sale outside the science fiction field. My first actual professional sale was a poem to a newspaper when I was under ten years of age. Also, when I began writing for the pulp field in the nineteen forties, I was writing in every category: mystery, western, what-have-you, simply because this was the only way to make a living. One of the common questions I used to run into from other people writing—admittedly little science fiction—in the pulp market was, "What percentage of your work are you selling?"

I was lucky enough to be able to answer, "All." But this was probably because I was picking the fields in which I wanted to write, and writing stories that had been tucked in the back of my head in embryo form for a long time. But my sales by then had ranged from a short-short in *newprint*—*The Toronto Star*—on down through a couple of western novelettes for which I wrote under a pseudonym, a house name in fact, the only instance of that in my career; and particularly something that I had made up my mind ahead of time that I wouldn't do.

So, what we're up against is that a great deal of the training ground is missing. Secondly, along with the training ground has gone a market.

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for the short, single plot line stories that come most easily to new writers. The proper complexities of an author take time to learn; and—more than time to learn—simply more experience in living. This is partially because the present book field, even the action paperback field, is one that places a premium on correct details. If you write about the inside of a submarine, you have to know how a submarine is laid out inside, etc.

So there's one strong factor which stands in the way of new writers being able to start early. I have a soaking bunch that while this is hard on the individual writer himself or herself, it may be all to the good for them in the long run to learn their craft in the book market, more slowly and over a period of time.

A problem with this at the present time is that publishers in general are starving their mid-list and back-list authors, in order to splurge wildly on possible best-sellers—particularly possible best-sellers written by first time writers.

This sounds like an opportunity, instead of a closed door to opportunity; but in fact the chance of a new writer receiving the push and promotion to make her or his first novel best-seller is roughly equivalent to winning a sweepstakes. All too often, the new writers who do this come in from outside the ordinary pipeline. That is, they either know somebody high up in the hierarchy of some publisher or other, or they are strongly pushed by a powerful agent because they have something that is particularly timely, or an idea that is particularly effective. The novel *Jaws*, for example, would fit into that last category.

To wind up, in effect I think what I'm saying is that a great many potentially good new writers are being stopped, or at least held up at the starting gate for publishers' financial reasons. On the other hand, those who do come into the field later on, often come in with more experience and more talent, even if they have been writing for no market other than themselves in the process of trying to turn out something that will be accepted, and as a result we have one of the factors at least that's made this a more literate market in general.

The craft-level element of the field, apart from the talent-level of the field (which has certainly not gone down. In fact, otherwise), is considerably higher, I think, than it was thirty or forty years ago.

Writers are required to suit their markets if they want to sell their

books and pay their bills. The pulp magazines required only a good story. Beyond this they put up with a great deal of sketch writing. In most cases this was necessary, because the ordinary full time pulp writer lived by production—first draft—final draft work. Write them—and get them out to market. And no time available to soak and mature the ideas for particular stories in back of the mind over a period of months or even years, before the work was written.

I believe that at least a strong part of the reason for the improved craft element of the field is simply the competition among more experienced writers. It's an illusion on the part of most of the world, including most of the publishing world, that a writer who's turned out a salable book manuscript has essentially fulfilled her or his possibilities as a writer, and if that writer improves from then on, it can only be by small increments.

This, of course is flatly untrue. As long as we continue to write, we continue to learn—unconsciously if no other way. In addition to that a great many of the writers in our field at least consciously study their own work to polish and improve it; and at least a few study all the other writers in the field to see if some tool can be discovered that that particular writer doesn't know. I know I myself do this; and I have said a number of times that have never read any published writer, without finding that writer able to do at least one thing that I would never be able to do.

While I may never be able to do exactly that, at the same time it can suggest an improvement, or something new that I can add to the tools of my own craft area. It has paid off for me tremendously over a period of years; and I'm convinced that it's one of the reasons that my books have stayed in print the way they have.

So, I see two villains in the woodwork ready to prevent the good, new, young writer from getting started. One of these is the lack of a training area for the shorter lengths of fiction that pays enough and is diverse enough to make it worthwhile as a learning ground. Secondly, the increased level of quality in the field, which grows greater with every decade, and the stiffer competition resulting.

—Gordon R. Dickson
Richfield, Minnesota

Zenith: The Best in New British Science Fiction, edited by David S. Garnett

London: Sphere Books, 1989; £3.50 pb

reviewed by Bruce Sterling



One of the joys of Anglophilia is a funky little item like *Zenith*. This all-original all-British paperback of anthology (a rare bird on five different counts) further scums the market-forces with a repulsive cover—thrillily nicked from *Interzone* (or maybe vice versa). British publishing booms are above all *tidy*; it seems that editor Garnett and *Interzone* editor David Pringle neatly recycle every stray snippet of baling-wire (including one another's authors and editorial rhetoric).

Garnett's brief introduction states in the mildest possible way that "this is an all-British anthology, but not through a deliberate anti-American policy." Imagine the situation reversed—Yankees forced-fed a near-exclusive diet of British sf for years, while local writers were systematically stifled through lack of publishing venue. Surely we'd be dumping tea-bales and shooting redcoats by now. Perhaps it's some Gandhianesque ploy of Garnett's, to chivvy the imperialist aggressors off his home turf with bland politeness and subtle noncooperation. I can't believe he likes this disgusting situation half as much as he claims. (Hell, I don't like it a lot and I *live* here.)

In any case, this book is the best single exemplar yet of "the new British sf," such as it is, and it's a pity that the parochial hordes of Yankeeedom can't be tied down en masse and forced to read every page of it. "Britain is soaring into the future with a wealth of talented science fiction writers"—*Zenith*'s blurb overstates the case; but it could be truthfully said that "Britain is motorizing sedately into a retro-eclectic fantasyland with a talented clique of alstreamers and true-quill

weirdos."

Among the latter group I cherish a special fondness for Storm Constantine and Ian McDonald. Despite my best efforts I have never yet been able to finish a Constantine or McDonald novel—in both cases it's like trying to eat a baobab of marzipan. But in the shorter form, their brave willingness to describe intense interior visions in totally brainfried and campily exotic prose really punches my ticket! McDonald, a Farmerian lunatic of wide-ranging interests and impressive smarts, is a babbling brook of imagery, with occasional limpid pools where still waters run sullen and deep. His "Gardenias" is a parable of countercultural transcendence set in a decaying high-tech Brazil; it's completely over-the-top, but actually feels like he, somehow, *means* it. It's scary in ways that are hard to define.

Storm Constantine is a Boho outlaw who has built a kind of glittery trash-lit Watts Tower out of Wm. Burroughs and cheese-o heavy-metal occultism. What a joy and relief it is to read a "story" like Constantine's bizarre effort "The Pleasure Giver Taken" in which the plot writhes, the setting strains and wrinkle like butcher-paper, vital characters never appear on-stage, and the action stops dead for demented wisecracks about surgically enhanced sexual deviance. As Greil Marcus said about punk music, it sounds like the greatest thing you have ever heard! This is a kind of writing that ignores every bourgeois rule of fiction and thus constantly threatens to go, or do, somewhere, or something *unpredictable*. As a long-playing CD it's tough sledding, but it's gangbusters as a

three-minute single.

The future of British sf is thrillingly unsafe in the hands of these two. Other writers potter more worryingly along. The immortal Aldis, Britain's oldest Young Turk, returns to his old obsession the Galactic Empire and offensively trashes the whole concept in a few pages. Barrington Bayley, who used to write great loopy stuff about universe being a bubble of air in an infinity of rock, and so forth, nowadays writes very gloomy pieces featuring pitiless antihuman juntas, unending trench warfare, and (in this case) a botched attempt at time-travel by a repellent totalitarian Europe. I take this trend of Bayley's as compelling circumstantial evidence that Margaret Thatcher should get the hell out of office for the sake of the country's psyche.

Lisa Tuttle, the expatriate doyenne of the London-Austin axis, writes another piece in her usual milieu of paranoid angst amid an atmosphere of quasi-sexual contamination. Instead of depicting women raped by parasitic wasps, or macho astronautics, sexually enslaving aliens, this classically Tuttleque story of overpowering quasi-erotic obsession conveys the offhanded notion that human men and women might enjoy sexual relations as a soothing and life-affirming experience! This doesn't actually happen within the story—instead there's a gruesome loveless copulation under the goggling eyes of a gigantic shadowy saucer-critter. But the possibility is mentioned. There's hope!

Robert Holdstock is surely the ultimate exemplar of the native British school of "eclecticism," i.e. the wholesale looting of ancient mythic tropes and mythical Jungian clutter in the service of postmodern fantasy. If you really feed on this stuff, Holdstock is the man for you; otherwise, you find yourselves wading through thickets of Portentous Capitalisation, weirdly pointless italics, even—for the climactic speech of spirit-forces—ALL CAPITALS. To my eye the effect seems bizarre, like making plastic tom-toms and juju aulets on an overhead tangle. But perhaps I simply miss the point; Arthur and Merlin aren't snoozing under the hills in my neck of The Great Dark Woods.

Colin Greenland's "The Traveller" is a time-traveller; also a morphine addict, drunk, and wife-batterer, who ends up skewered with scissors when he tries to rape his daughter, who is our pathetic brow-beaten narrator. Perhaps the stress of time-travel drove the rascal to it; it's a bit hard to tell; it's not what editor Garnett would call a "rattling good yarn" but it deserves to be here if only to show Yankees how upblast *Asimov's* is.

In Andrew Stephenson's "Cinema Altere" a rush-hour crowd is blasted to napalm flinders in a pre-arranged "terrorist attack," which is typed by arty degenerates for its entertainment value. It was funnier when Richard Kadey did it in *Nature* and it wasn't very funny then; what's worse, Stephenson cops out with some song-and-dance about "paradox" and "randomness." The crew ends up filming the horror without actually committing it! I've been that, having reviewed the story without actually reading all of it.

Garry Kilworth is a writer of ability; in "White Noise" he burlesques up an utterly goofy Biblical megaflood that makes Creation Science look like hard-af. Strictly from Kooksville.

Elizabeth Soubart's "Feminopolis" is set in an alternate Earth where male human beings are non-sentient; great bronzed beasts essentially, really hunky guys that the gals sensibly keep in cages. Kind of a nifty idea, but she doesn't get into it in any way, preferring to attempt labored jokes at the expense of us supposedly brainier guys here in Realityland. Alas, to successfully ridicule other people's stupidity requires a convincing display of superior gifts.

William King's "Skyrider" is an earnest piece of scifi-punk, not badly written but lacking much visionary edge. Its dirt stupid ex-pilot hero is cloned from the protog of Walter Jon Williams's *Hardwired*, leading to that lifeless blurring inherent in cheap multiple xeroxes. One mildly interesting aspect of "Skyrider" is its clear derivation from the Euro-disco "acid house" scene, as opposed to the grungy late '70s punk clubs frequented by Yankee Mirrorshades types when they were still limber enough to dance. There's nothing wrong with William King that reading a lot more Rudy Rucker wouldn't cure.

"The Bridge," by Christopher Evans is a fitting finale to *Zenith*, for it encapsulates the merits, and the disquieting peculiarities, of British sf as she is wrote today. Here is part of Evans' introduction:

"The Bridge" is chronologically the third in a series of stories following the life-history of a master-artist called Vendavo in a society where there exist invisible, ethereal creatures known as chimeras which can be brought into physical existence in any shape by artists whose minds are sufficiently well-attuned to them. The world of the story is pre-technological in most respects, dominated by a dictatorship known as the Hierarchy. . . .

As befits the author of a guidebook called *Writing Science Fiction* (St. Martin's Press, 1988) the story's narrative values are impeccable. There is a solid background, compelling characters with realistic motivations, interesting bouts of palace intrigue, numerous ideologically correct female characters—(every last one of whom is coolly assured, ambitious, and thoroughly at ease with herself). There are some turns of phrase, a high level of imaginative concentration, an obvious and sincere concern with literary craft.

The story is art pour l'art of the most extreme kind. It exists in a literary limbo. It has no basic topic but itself and its plot machineries. Vendavo's world has no relationship whatsoever with consensus reality; it is inhabited by people named Ethetaim, Tilarwa, Nisbit; names that sound inherently absurd to a reader with any sense of irony.

Autistic American fantasy shares these distinctions. But this is British fantasy, so there is a peculiarly mandarin air to the business, with obsessive over-accuracy in small matters: "sufficiently well-attuned" where "attuned" would do, "The third in a series of stories" instead of "third story." "The Bridge" is elevated over the slough of Yankee tripe by a scaffolding of ornate language; the more struts and girders it has, the less likely it is to be reduced to its basic state of eclectic tapicisms.

The story has no particular political or moral conviction to convey. Nor is there anything akin to an sf idea or an extrapolation in it. The "chimeras" can accomplish great marvels; but we are never asked to imagine their obvious real-world consequences—such as infinite supplies of free food. This kind of critical, skeptical thought must be avoided at all cost, lest the entire fantastic structure of "The Bridge" collapse like shrink-wrap next to a flame.

The idea is to wrap oneself in a story as snugly as possible; pull it over your head like a parka, and make no sudden movements. Unlike the saccharine Yankee version of pseudomedievalism, Evans' work features plagues, drowned rats, street riots, corpses with "bulging eyes" and "soiled leggings," but these attempts at "realism" seem weirdly stagey and counterproductive, more like badges of obligatory grunge, than any real authorial interest in the inherent variety of human life. It's hard to determine the point of Evans' meticulous efforts, except to produce a well-tooled artifact for exclusive consumption by the subculture of British sf readers.

And, as such, this kind of fiction can hold its special ground—But for there to be more and different *Zeniths*—as there should be by every right—it will be necessary to stop manning the crumbling ramparts of Gormenghast, and carry the war to the enemy. Stories should be launched, much greater risks taken. Let British sf be "arty" if it wants, only tologdyes bitch about "artiness" in a milieu with Shepard Wolfe Robinson Kessel Fowler Morrow Murphy Le Guin Auster Weiner Womack & Co.

Let it be "depressing" even (if it thinks it can be half as depressing as the everyday evening news). Why are there no British sf stories here—good or bad, blunt or arty, pro or con—about actual British issues, like Europe '92, the Channel Tunnel, HOTOL, ESPRIT, the end of the Cold War, and the upshot when the Yanks pack bag and baggage from Greenham Common (and practically everywhere else in the 51st State)?

Why do British sf writers leave it to Tory politicians like Michael Heseltine to imagine and define the future of their own country and own continent, while they themselves muck about with Merlin and the Magic Munchkins? If I were British, I might wonder a bit about this state of affairs in the native land of H. G. Wells. ▴

Bruce Sterling's most recent novel, *Islands in the Net*, recently won the John W. Campbell Memorial Award for best sf novel of 1988.

How Not to Teach Science Fiction

Continued from page 1

from her and be but a shriek among shrieks, melting into the hiss and smash and ugly grumble of the sea's insanity.

In the other bed, Lois shifted restlessly under the crisp sheet. . . .

If the story did make the rounds as a mundane tale, it did not place. What is "Hurricane Trio" about? A bright and rising engineer, Yancey Bowman, and his very ordinary wife, Beverly, go on a vacation to a lodge; arriving in the pouring rain, soaked and miserable, they are taken in by Lois, the lodge's manager. Lois is beautiful, efficient, self-possessed—everything that Beverly is not. When Yancey invites Lois for a drink and Beverly runs out to get some ice from the vacationers in the cabin next door, there is an electric moment, full of sexuality, between Yancey and Lois. But instead of doing anything about it, Yancey decides to cut short the vacation by a day. And Beverly, who basically does everything she possibly can for her adored, brilliant husband, goes along with it.

For two years, Yancey, with Beverly in tow, has rising successes in his job; Beverly supports him in every way, and the two grow together in the manner of married couples, then, off on another vacation, Beverly and Yancey again run into Lois. No longer a lodge manager, now Lois is merely another tourist, like Yancey and Bev—and this time there's a hurricane and deluge.

No rooms are to be had at any of the hotels on the highway. Beverly insists that Lois come with them and, remembering Lois's kindnesses to them from two years before, invites Lois to sleep in their room with them. (This is, of course, where our story starts; the rest is told in flashbacks.) Shortly, Bev gets up and leaves the room with her watch and a copy of *Anna Karenina*. ("The silver light made everything in the room look like an over-exposed photograph, but Beverly's flesh seemed pink—the only thing in the whole mad, pulsing world that had any color but grey or black or silver.") She goes off to go read in the bathroom, and as he lies there in the dark Yancey realizes that his wife has understood the electricity between him and Lois all along. She is actually contriving to give the beautiful, elegant Lois (who is so much more than Beverly) to him—because she knows he wants her. And Beverly has always given him everything he wants: it has been the entire strategy and reason of her marriage—and is responsible for all the good things that have happened to them over the years. On realizing this, he realizes as well that he cannot accept the gift and calls his wife back to bed. ("Beverly!" he bellowed.) Inside the bathroom he hears her drop the book to the tiles.

And the story concludes:

She switched off the light and came in. A moonbeam swept across her face as she approached. She was looking across him at Lois, her lips trembling. She got into bed. He put his arms around her, gently, humbly. She turned to him and suddenly held him so tight that he almost cried out.

One assumes that such a marriage would have been destroyed by this final self-sacrifice on Beverly's part, but because of Yancey's insight, it is saved.

"Hurricane Trio" is a paean to marital fidelity, to self-sacrificing wives, to the value of monogamy, and to every myth of the "quiet inner strength" of women vs. the "overt brilliance" of men. As well, it reinforces the idea that the basic goodness and morality of such womanly sacrifices must bring out the good in the most egotistical and hateful of men. Had the story been accepted and printed in a non-sf publication, and had it gained the least little literary attention, one can easily see it having gone on to have become the benchmark of its decade, the 1950s.

But the story is by Sturgeon.

The eye it casts on all three characters, the kind of understanding it requests of the reader, the sharpness of the pains it delineates, the astonishing strength it tells us that such a sacrifice requires, and the simple sensitivity to the physical and emotional world it demands, make the story begin to unsettle precisely the values it appeals to. And its honesty and accuracy of observation make it clear, by the end of the

tale, that these are three quite extraordinary people after all and that, indeed, only extraordinary people might actually behave this way. Even today the tale has an element of shock on the emotional level that has little or nothing to do with sex per se.

If Sturgeon had let an earlier, mundane version of the story continue to circulate, who knows what might have happened. But in a situation where financial pressure was on him, at a certain point, presumably, he decided to rewrite it as a science fiction story—and sell it in the markets where he and his work were already valued commodities. Indeed, the rewriting recalls nothing so much as the opening movement of his first story ("Elber Knathing," 1939) and its irate writer hero who re-wrote his "Seashell" first as a short story, then a novella, then a novel, then as a three-line gag, and finally as a television play—as if the picture of genre-jumping with which Sturgeon opened his sf career were somehow predictive of the situation he was to find himself in sixteen years on.

The factors that turned 1955's "Hurricane Trio" from the most sensitive of mundane fiction stories into a beautifully written—but finally rather ordinary—sf story would be almost entirely in the form of additions. (I know few people who would list the tale among their top twenty-five Sturgeon stories—though, in its mundane version I might well put it in my top 25 stories by all American writers for that decade.)

The plot of the sf version differs only by one element. Between the first meeting with Lois and the second . . .

But before we discuss plot, let's look at the language. The opening few lines of the sf version differs only by one phrase from the mundane version:

Yancey, who had once been killed, lay very still with his arm flung across the pillow, and watched the moonlight play with the color of Beverly's hair. . . .

Before we turn to the plot of the published, sf version of this story, a more immediate and possibly richer question at the textual level is what is the significance of this wholly non-normal—even jarring—intrusion of death into the opening sentence of this tale? Certainly, it suggests to the average, competent sf reader, that this is, indeed, an sf story. It is what allows us to name the situation "non-normal" in the first place. People who have "once been killed" don't usually lie about watching much of anything.

Our hurricane trio—Yancey, Beverly, and Lois—will plot out almost the identical path as did the mundane version of themselves; but the intrusion of death into the opening sentence will function as a semiotic marker for the intrusion of death into the center of the diagesis itself.

What happens differently in the sf version?

After Yancey and Beverly's first meeting with Lois, and before their second encounter, Yancey's speeding car crashes into an alien spaceship that happens to have landed on the road—and Yancey is killed. The alien ship takes the mangled car and its dead occupants into itself; the aliens put them back together, now making them a little bit better and more efficient than they were before; then they are set out on the road again, returned to a new life and an even greater health than they had, to continue the old story—which, save a phrase here and a brief paragraph there, remains the same.

The somewhat tepid denouement (also an addition of a single brief paragraph) is that Yancey realizes, in the end, that he was not the only one who had died in the crash against the spaceship; Beverly had died too, and been brought to life again as well. The strength to make her gesture had been given her by the aliens—as, indeed, had his strength to refuse it. What he first thought *only* a gift to him turns out to have been a gift to them both.

Indeed, what the sf version does is throw into question precisely that set of fifties values that the mundane version of the story so supports. In the mundane version, both Yancey's and Beverly's strength simply comes from two years of living and growing ever closer in what, to all outside appearances, seems a very ordinary marriage.

The sf version, says, in effect: "Come on. Who are you kidding? I don't care how wonderful a wife she was, this is just not the way a normal woman—or a normal man—would act in this situation, unless there was non-normal interference." And it is precisely because the

original tale had the moral and psychological interstices built into it that were later filled up with the rationale of the benevolent aliens that—doubtless—the original story was unsettling enough to keep it out of the general fiction outlets where Sturgeon had originally hoped the tale might go.

But despite all my speculations, this troubling death still hangs there, pendulous in the first clause of the first sentence, still somehow in excess of my particular ideological reading.

"Yancey, who had once been killed . . ."

If the tension between its syntactic propriety and its semantic contradictions render this phrase a signifier of science fiction, what happens when we follow that signifier to the web of signifiers that make up its signified in the text of "Hurricane Trio"?

Certainly the major set of them gather almost twelve pages after the opening, in a scene almost three pages long—the major science fictional interpolation in the original tale that produces the ideological skewing I spoke of.

If only for its precision and science fictional poetry, it is worth reading, even if I make various abridgments. Yancey and Bev Bowman are speeding away from the lodge, speeding away from the electric encounter between Yancey and Lois, the encounter which, at this point, Bev has all but (pretended) not to have noticed, with Yancey driving faster and faster, growing angrier and angrier at what he takes to be Beverly's uncomprehendingness:

He sent the car howling through a deep cut in the crest of a hill, and around the blind turn on the other side, which is where he collided with the space ship and was killed. . . . [Here there is another page back in the hotel room, where Yancey is recalling all this; then the scene goes on:] As the spaceship lifted, it retracted its berthing feet, it was one of these which Bowman's sedan struck. The car continued under the ship, and the edge of the flat berthing foot sliced it down to the belt line, leaving a carmine horror boding the wheel. The ship hovered momentarily, then drifted over to the side of the road where the mangled automobile had come to rest. Directly above the car, it stopped. An opening appeared in the bottom of the ship and dilated like a camera iris. There was a slight swirl of dust and leaves, and then what was left of the car rose from the ground and disappeared into the ship . . .

Exactly what was done to him, Yancey could not know. He was made aware of the end results, of course. He knew that what had been injured had been repaired, and that in addition certain changes had been made to improve the original. For example, his jaw hinges had been redesigned to eliminate a tendency to dislocation, and a process was started which would, in time, eliminate the sebaceous cysts which kept forming and occasionally inflaming ever since he was an adolescent. His vermiform appendix was gone—not excised, but removed in some way which would indicate, in the event of an autopsy, that it had never formed in the first place. His tonsils had been replaced for reasons which he could not understand except that they were good ones. On the other hand, such anomalies as his left little toe, which since birth had been bent and lay diagonally across its neighbor, and a right eye which wandered slightly to the right when he was fatigued—these were left as they had originally been. . . . In sum, he had been altered only in ways which would not show.

He did know, however, why these things had been done. There was inside that ship an aura of sympathy mixed with remorse unlike anything he had ever felt. Another component was respect, an all-embracing respect for living things. Somewhere near where he lay in the ship's laboratory was a small covered shelf containing a cicada, two grasshoppers, four summer moths, and an earthworm, all casualties of his accident. Their cell structure, organic functions, and digestive and reproductive processes were under study as meticulous as that which was being lavished on him. For their restitution was to be made also, and they would be released in as good condition as this unthinkably advanced science could make them . . .

He was to find out later that they had done the same things with his car as they had done with him. He had not the slightest doubt that if they had wished they could have rebuilt the old sedan into a gleaming miracle, capable of flight and operable forever on a teacup-full of fuel. He found it looking as it had always looked, even to rust spots and a crinkling around the windshield where moisture had penetrated the laminations of the safety glass. Yet there was a little more pickup, a little more economy; the brakes were no longer grabby in wet weather; and the cigarette lighter heated up in fewer seconds than before. . . .

Most miraculous, of course, was the lowered impulse-resistance of his nervous system, including the total brain. He needed no longer run over and over a thought sequence, like a wheel making a run, to establish a synapse and therefore retain knowledge. He had superfast physical reactions. He had total recall (from the time of his release from the ship) and complete access to his previous memory banks. . . .

So it was that after death had struck one Friday morning, that same morning hour on Sunday revealed a strange sight (but only to some birds and a frightened chipmunk). Slipping out of the earth itself, the ship spread topside where it had lain, covered it with a little snow of early-fallen leaves, and shouldered into the sky. It wheeled and for a moment paralleled the deserted highway below. The opening on its belly appeared, and down through the shining air swept an aging two door sedan, its wheels spinning and its motor humming. When it touched the roadway there was not so much as a puff of dust, so perfectly were wheels and forward motion synchronized.

The car hurtled through a cut in a hilltop and around the blind turn on the other side, and continued on its way, with Yancey Bowman at the wheel, seething inwardly at the unreachable stupidities of his wife. . . .

So he drove too fast and was too quiet, and his anger bubbled away until at length it concentrated into something quieter and rather uglier. As it formed, he drove more sensibly, and Beverly relaxed and leaned back, turning now and again to inspect the shutters or the curtains in a house they passed, watching the sky up ahead while she thought her own thoughts.

The particular combination of the lyric and the precise is one of the elements that makes this scene uniquely Sturgeon's. You will find it neither in Heinlein, Asimov, or Clarke. And when Alfred Bester approaches it, he does so in an entirely different voice and timbre. For we suspect deeply that the "aura of sympathy" and the "all embracing respect for living things" that Sturgeon imputes to his unknowable aliens (if not the "remorse") is, indeed, at the core of the Sturgeon enterprise, and as such is the source of both the lyricism and the precision as well as the marvelous voice we associate with him.

Yet if momentarily we can bracket all these elements—acuteness, music, and timbre—if we can look at the text above with a critical spirit that reduces it simply to a collection of semantic nodes, a collection of signs in a web of signs, a collection of signifiers of those signs, we find ourselves with an interesting, even paradoxical, pattern.

The signifier that led us to this scene as it meaning—"Yancey, who had once been killed . . ." the first indication of science fiction in this tale's text—is a signifier of if through virtue of its misplacement of death. And the signified it points to—the scene we have just quoted—is, paradoxically, a profligate intermixture of signifiers associated as much with death as with life—possibly even more with life. And also with knowledge.

The images are of reparation, restitution, correction, and cure. From the initial homonomous paradox of the "berthing"/"biting" foot (Sturgeon spells it with the nautical "e," but who does not hear in the obnoxious "Y") that accomplishes the actual slaughter, however, death and life, under the aegis of knowledge (the "unthinkably advanced science") compete and interweave through the text.

All one has to do is go through the scene and construct the most cursory of semantic clumps, and one finds on one side, "nut, casualties, injury, eliminate, excise, dislocation, sebaceous cysts, bent, remorse,"

while on the other we get, "lavish, restitution, miraculous, repair, result, improve, redesign, altered, sympathy, synchronized." Through all of them weave "know, aware, knew, know [again], find out, knowledge, thinking, thoughts," until indeed a restitution of the text itself takes place, and the sentence that introduces the scene and looks it to the first sentence in the text ("He sent the car howling through a deep cut in the crest of a hill, and around the blind turn on the other side, which is where he collided with the space ship and was killed") is restored, to the text in a slightly improved version—a way that almost, unless one reads them one after another, does not show: "The car hurtled through a cut in a hilltop and around the blind turn on the other side and continued on its way, with Yancey Bowman at the wheel, seething inwardly at the unreachable stupidities of his wife."

Q Only note one further paradox: Sturgeon tried to improve the salability of his story by making it science fiction. In the story itself, the movement of the text is clearly toward improving a sentence by allowing it, in its restored form, to drop the signifier of science fiction—that misplaced death—from among its very words. Is this enough to justify my attempt to restore the text, for the sake of critical comparisons, to its pre-science fictional form?

What this particular play of life, death, and epistemology was a sign of—what it signified, what further complex web of signifiers it might lead us to, within the *sf* genre—was a question I could not have begun to answer till eleven years after the story was published.

In the winter of 1966/1967, I spent three weeks in London (my second visit), over which time Langdon Jones, then assistant editor of *New Worlds Magazine*, under the auspices of editor Michael Moorcock, called a meeting at his home of as many *New Worlds* writers as he could get together. As a visiting American *sf* writer who'd written a guest editorial for the magazine the previous summer, I was invited—but circumstances contrived against my actual attendance. Nevertheless, the proceedings were reported to me by Tom Disch, John Sladek, and others.

At the meeting Jones located three "conventions" of traditional science fiction:

The first was the Generous *SF* Universe: In a world where no one survives an ordinary jet plane crash, in a solar system with only one oxygenated planet, science fiction nevertheless went on blithely writing about crash-landings of spaceships on other worlds from which everyone walks away, more or less unscathed, into a landscape of breathable atmosphere, amenable flora and fauna, and often civilized beings. . . . But this only begins to sketch out the generosity science fiction attributes to the universe. I'm sure each of you can add your own examples.

The second convention was the Linearity of *SF* Intelligence: In a world where the reigning math genius at any given universe is eighty pounds over (or under) weight and can't keep his shirt buttons in their right holes, science fiction insistently presents scientific geniuses who just happen to have black belts in karate and are able to negotiate with total suavity any social situation whatsoever. Indeed, the *sf* genius/hero is invariably a genius not only in his own field but in everybody else's as well. At a certain point, one realizes that it is the concept of what intelligence is, how it forms, and its function in the human condition that classical *sf* presents in a distorted manner.

The third convention was that of Individual as Historically Effective: In a world where no socially meaningful progress seems possible unless groups of people work long and hard together, science fiction constantly presents tales in which a single individual is capable of changing the entire path of human history.

These were, of course, three conventions of science fiction that Moorcock and Jones were not interested in promoting in *New Worlds*—the publishing spearhead of the 1960s "New Wave."

And what they published from 1967 on must be read in light of this conscientious esthetic program.

But recently I've become interested (first) in the often subtle interrelationship of these three conventions and (second) in their astonishing tenacity in the *sf* field. Along with them, is the astonishing number of *sf* stories and novels that evoke one or more of these conventions precisely to criticize the others—or, in a number of fascinating limit cases, in order to critique the very convention they evoke.

But let us bracket the last two conventions and look at the first one in a bit more detail—the generous universe; for that generosity is rampant among all the paratextual genres, even as it manifests itself in different ways in the different genres: consider the generosity of the universe of the classical mystery novel, where crime is always the manifestation of logic and thus always accessible to a greater knowledge (certainly not a very realistic view of the "crime," say, that plagues the nation's greater cities, high or low, today); or the generosity of the world of the "cliff hanger" film (such as the latest Spielberg offering, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*), where simply to touch the hand of whoever hangs from cliff or cornice is to rescue him or her—in a world where the government reports that more than 85% of the males and females of this country over the age of sixteen can not raise their own bodyweight a full eighteen inches, much less pull themselves (or a friend) to safety when dangling by his or her fingers.

Or consider the endless sexual generosity of pornography. Looked at in context of the paratextual genres, one begins to notice alongside that generosity that the profligacy of death—the incredible number of lives that cowboy and espionage and mystery films have been wasting for years—is actually the disturbing underbelly of that same generosity. When the universe is so unrealistically, so insistently, so unrelentingly generous, death simply can not have the same meaning. One thinks of nature—where an abundance of life means, finally, that life itself becomes ridiculously cheap. It is almost as if, to highlight the astonishing abundance of unbelievable coincidences, strengths, and skills with which these genres glut the pages of a paperback novel and lavish over the screen, they must provide a background of innumerable deaths to foreground the heroic in these tales. In this light, then, we might even say (once more with a hint of paradox) that the meaningless death becomes a *symptom* of the generosity of the paratextual universe.

And if we again approach Sturgeon's tale, taking up its initial science fictional sentence ("Yancey, who had once been killed, lay very still with his arm flung across the pillow, and watched the moonlight play with the color of Beverly's hair. . ."), certainly it is not difficult, at this rereading, to see it not only as a sign of science fiction but as a symptom of the generosity that we will find, later on, precisely in the specifically *sf* scene to which, as signifier, it will lead us.

For that is certainly what that precise and lyric scene, with its redesigned jaw-hinges and banished cysts, is all about: a marvelously generous universe in which, as if this particular story were, in itself, a limit case, an accidental and meaningless death can, through the generosity of a universe replete with aliens of an "unthinkably advanced science," be restored not only to a living, but to a living that is even finer than life without it, than living before it—in much the way that the science fictional scene allows itself the restoration of the new improved non-science fictional version of its own signifying sentence.

But unlike mysteries and espionage fiction and (pace) pornography, science fiction—the best science fiction—as it clings tenaciously to its conventions, indulges in articulate critique of precisely those conventions. Asimov's *Foundation* series, which, as it set itself up to dramatize the entire materialist infrastructure of history, turned (in 1945) under the example of Hitler and Stalin (when it took on the character of the Mule), to ask, yes, precisely what is required for one man to change the course of history? And John Brunner's *The Whole Man*, following in the footsteps of Stapledon's *Odd John* and Weinbaum's *The New Adam*, took up the challenge of what, precisely, is this thing, intelligence, genius, or its constituents: and left it teased apart so that Disch, in his own astonishing novel, *Camp Concentration*, could once again—in perhaps the most generous universe of all—ally it to pain, death, and disfigurement: certainly one of the high points in the publication career of *New Worlds*, under which these conventions were first articulated.

What does Sturgeon's story, in the double version, finally tell us? "Hurricane Trio"—by being science fiction—tells us that no ordinary man and woman could actually cleave successfully to such monogamous values without the intervention of an "unthinkably advanced science" in an unthinkably generous universe capable of triumphing over death itself—a message that then, and now, could not possibly be acceptable to a general readership magazine.

"The meaningless death is a symptom of the universe's generosity."

ity."

But think how differently that diagnostic sentence reads when applied to the shoot-'em-up adventure film and when applied to written science fiction—when applied to *this* science fiction text. In the shoot-'em-up, it is the sheer number of deaths ("without funerals or burials" (as I once heard it put) that renders these deaths meaningless, even while the filmic apparatus, now through slow motion, now with the cut at the sound of impact, continually insists that, somehow, there is a meaning here—though often the only meaning we can lift out of it is the obliteration of meaning itself: an important point to be sure, even if that meaning is one whose structure is identical to the repetition of the endlessly iterated neurotic symptom—an action repeated in a futile attempt to master a meaning it is now cut off from, but which at one time the neurotic subject vaguely suspects or suspected that he or she might once have wholly possessed. In the shoot-'em-up, these deaths are pure effect (that is, they always depend on misplaced effect), pure pretence (no matter how skilled), and the very insistence with which the genre repeats them, in its yearning for meaningful closure, is the signature of their meaninglessness.

In "Hurricane Trio," no repetition compulsion renders Yancy's death in the first sentence "meaningless." It would be more accurate to say that the syntax of the clause "who had just been killed" displaces death from its traditional position as a termination of life. Rather, that semantic/syntactic/generic economy fixes death in the midst of a life that exists on both sides of it. Meaning has been displaced, but not obliterated.

In the shoot-'em-up, the generosity lavished on the hero—the hair's-breadth escapes, the extraordinary combination of skill, luck, and courage—invariably originate outside the text: more accurately, in the realistic tradition to which these films and stories overwhelmingly appeal, and to which the notion of a textual inside and outside is pivotal, the only location for this generosity is extratextual unless we are prepared to indulge a great deal of mental double-think and self-reflexive bracketing, which, indeed, the general audience for these tales is trained to do from the age of eight onward.

With the audience's consent, this generosity is always mystified by the text—that is, the movement of these texts is always toward normalizing these deaths, toward hiding their origin, toward making them seem the most natural thing in the world, at the same time as it never lets them close with the profligate generosity they symptomatize.

Thus, in the shoot-'em-up, both symptom and cause operate in the area of the inarticulate, the repressed, and the pathological—that area traditionally labeled the "immature."

But this is not what is going on in "Hurricane Trio." Here the generosity of the universe associated with science fiction intrudes precisely to demystify a heroic literary assumption hidden and inarticulate in the mundane text: Yancey and Bev are not engaging in normal behavior.

Death's intrusion is precisely articulated, with lyricism and precision. That generosity is spelled out in the scene we read. And it is that generosity which—articulately and in the narrative foreground—displaces the death it brings, symptomatically, with it and rescinds as effect. Cause and symptom are, so to speak, one. The generosity is the displaced meaning. This displacement of the meaning is the generous act. And where does the excess, if there is any, of that generosity fall?

On "a cicada, two grasshoppers, four summer moths, and an earthworm." Thanks to that "respect for all living things" (and that respect is precisely what is pathologically absent in the shoot-'em-up), deaths that would have ordinarily been meaningless are given, within the story, a meaning.

"The meaningless death is a symptom of the universe's generosity."

Rereading our diagnostic sentence, we notice that—in the context of science fiction—it is only the pathological connotations hovering about the word "symptom" that are, in the case of Sturgeon, out of place.

A more accurate articulation here might be: "In sf, the displaced meaning of death is a sign of the true universe's generosity."

Having committed this revision, we can see, in much the same way as the text of "Hurricane Trio," by becoming science fiction, moved to restore Yancy to life and greater health, as it moved to restore (by a science fictional move) a science fictional sentence to greater precision

and congruence to the mundane, it also moved to take our very diagnosis of it and articulate that diagnosis's repressions, strip it of its pathology, restore it to a semiotic purity, and redesign it at an order of strength and precision that, without the science fictional critique, we simply would not have had access to.

But this brings us, by commodious recirculation as it were, back to the title of our talk—how not to teach science fiction. Is the sort of reading I have outlined here, for Sturgeon's tale, the way I wish science fiction *not* to be taught? Clearly this represents the kind of reading I'd wish, rather, to encourage. Indeed, among the first texts my sf class will read, next term, at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, is my reconstructed mundane version of "Hurricane Trio" *en face* with the sf version. And my first lecture on these paired texts will make many of the points I have made here.

But I must conclude by saying that I don't believe science fiction can be taught in the way I have been exploring if there unless we agree *not* to do certain things.

In the very first lecture to my science fiction classes, I usually perform the following move. I ask the class to tell me what they think the traditional "themes" of science fiction are. And I ask those people who are regular readers of sf not to participate in the discussion. I explain that I want only those who view sf largely from outside to give me their impressions. Within five minutes, from even the most comatose Freshmen, I can usually generate the following list of half a dozen sf themes:

Time.
Space.
Technology.
Exploring New Worlds.
Aliens.
Utopia/Dystopia:

Now I ask those in the class who *are* readers if this list doesn't, when all is said and done, cover what most of the criticism of sf they've encountered more or less leaves to? And, usually, they agree. Then I make the point, at whatever degree of sophistication I think the class can handle, that it seems somewhat odd to me that people who don't even read the genre can so quickly and easily come up with these apparent "fundamentals." Perhaps, I suggest, the ease with which they can be pointed to by people wholly illiterate in the genre suggest they are not so fundamental after all—but only blatant and obvious. (For a more critically sophisticated class, I may, at this point, give the historical provenance for these "themes" to show that each of them originates outside of science fiction, at various places in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th Century criticism of, respectively, European and American literature, and that, indeed, most of them have been sloughed off, or even imposed, on science fiction because in the larger field of literary criticism, nobody really wants them any more.) Then I suggest that, because these ideas are so self-evident that anyone who has even glanced at an sf comic book can probably come up with them, perhaps they are not the most interesting things about science fiction—that perhaps they are not the things that we, in a science fiction class, should be spending our time with.

Then I start to talk about patterns, about conventions, about dispositions, about moods of science fiction that can only be teased out from actually reading science fiction texts—and reading them carefully and alertly. Often, here I begin with the three conventions that the "New Wave" initially launched its esthetic program against.

Then we read some of the New Wave stories and examine how subtly the stories cling to those conventions in spite of the writers' (and the editors') clear attempts to get away from them.

But there are many, many more such sf conventions—or apparatuses, or dispositifs, or dispositions—than the three I have mentioned—or the one I have traced out in Sturgeon's story of sacrifice and restoration. I shun the word "theme" because it suggests, as do "Time," "Space," and "Technology," that once one has located it, mapped it out through the text, and traced its edges, you have somehow done your critical job and the theme's location has somehow disposed of the text in some meaningful way; and I don't think this is ever what the critic—or the teacher—should ever let happen.) In short, I think the way not

to teach is to glance at the affect and say the first thing that presents itself to mind.

For what presents itself at such a glance is always something that has been imposed on the text.

I think the way to teach science fiction is to read the text, to read it carefully, to impose oneself as a reader on the text, and to listen, with the most alert of critical ears, to look with the most alert of critical eyes,

at what the text does in terms of the genre—even to the point of exploring how the text subverts the very dispositions, generic or otherwise, it taught us to be alert to in the first place. ▀

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Alexei and Cory Panshin
Universal Principles of Operation
from The World Beyond the Hill
(Part III of III)

Lyon Sprague de Camp was born in New York City on November 27, 1907. As a boy, he took his share of licks for being overly well-read and well-bred and for having a snooty name. However, without ever losing his aristocratic bearing, Sprague gradually managed to learn to get along in the rough-and-tumble world of the Twentieth Century by taking life as he found it, offering respect to all, cultivating a sense of humor, and becoming interested in the new science and technology.

John Carter of Mars, an early hero of his, had more than a little to do with how he met life.

De Camp majored in aeronautical engineering in college, and then did graduate work in engineering and economics. Like so many others, however, his immediate hopes for a career got sidetracked by the Depression. At the time he first met Campbell, he was the principal of the inventions and patents branch of the International Correspondence School in Scranton, Pennsylvania, a job that was much less grand than his title might suggest.

In 1937, his college roommate, John D. Clark, brought him into the informal circle of New York SF writers to which John Campbell belonged. De Camp had just sold a story to *Astounding*, but it hadn't yet been published. Campbell was then still some months away from being hired as editor of the magazine.

The two men hit it off together immediately. De Camp, the beginning science fiction writer, was impressed by Campbell, the old pro. In those scuffling days, Campbell was more reserved and less aggressively argumentative a person than he would later become, and de Camp was struck by the shrewdness and quietly-voiced good sense of his observations on writing.

But Campbell saw something special in de Camp, too.

When he became editor of *Astounding*, Campbell requested and bought a story, or even several, from most of the writers who had sat in with his old circle—Edmond Hamilton, Henry Kuttner, Manly Wade Wellman, Otto Binder, Frank Belknap Long. Of these, it was the ever-adaptable Jack Williamson who would work out the best for him. Starting with *The Legion of Time* (*Astounding*, May-June 1938), Campbell would be able to rely on Williamson to contribute a novel and a shorter story each year to *Astounding* or *Unknown*.

However, out of all the SF writers he knew, it was the newcomer, L. Sprague de Camp, whom Campbell picked to become his first major ally in the presentation of modern science fiction.

On the face of it, that might seem strange. De Camp's first story, published in the last Tremaine-edited issue of *Astounding*, was lively and learned, but it was also clumsy. Moreover, de Camp did not know a lot about science fiction. He had never been a regular reader of the pulp magazines. His own influences in SF ran more to Edgar Rice Burroughs, Mark Twain, Lord Dunsany and E. R. Edgison than to E. E. Smith, Don A. Stuart and Stanley Weinbaum.

But three things in particular recommended de Camp to Campbell.

One was de Camp's special background and experience. He had been editor of his college newspaper at Cal Tech, and he was co-author of a new book on patents and their management. De Camp was that altogether rare individual inside science fiction or out—the man who combined a sound technical education with the ability to express himself clearly and easily. John Campbell was prepared to appreciate a scientific man who knew how to write.

De Camp's second attraction for Campbell was his temperament. To the outward eye, de Camp might be stiff, upright and thoroughly 16 The New York Review of Science Fiction

proper—a man of unimpeachable rationality. But, as Campbell soon came to recognize, lurking beneath this well-buttoned exterior there was another de Camp with urges to be a zany, a social critic and a romantic. Campbell, the professional provocateur, could respond to de Camp's heretical inclinations.

Third, and by no means least important, was "Hezekiah Plantagenet." This was the name of an oral round-robin game that de Camp had played as a boy and then came to introduce to the writers circle. In this game, one player would invent a terrific predicament for Hezekiah the continuing hero, and then pass the story on. The challenge for the next person was to think of a way out—and then to imagine Hezekiah into a new and even tougher fix for the succeeding player to cope with.

But these science fiction writers were asked to play the game in science fiction terms. Hezekiah was to be opposed by a mad scientist, Homer Mifket. And however far-fetched the problems posed and the solutions offered (and, by all means, the wilder the better) they were not allowed to run contrary to the known laws of nature.

Not only was this game of de Camp's a great deal of fun, and wonderful exercise in SFish onenessmanship, but it was also highly revealing of knowledge, attitude, and character. It cannot have been altogether lost on Campbell that certain writers were just too old-fashioned, too lacking in contemporary scientific knowledge, or too slow to play the game well. Or, that whenever it seemed convenient to him, careless facile young Henry Kuttner might simply throw out something outrageous along the lines of, "Well, just then a hole in space happened along, and Hezekiah stepped into it"—at least until he was hoisted down by his fellows.

Most of all, however, it cannot have escaped Campbell's attention that despite his impulses toward irreverence, L. Sprague de Camp was one SF writer willing and able to play strictly within the rules, paying all due respect to scientific law, and yet still able to be consistently inventive and amusing.

De Camp was a rebel within the law. And that made him just the man for John Campbell.

If there was a fourth point of recommendation, it was that de Camp was available. De Camp had long been restless off in Scranton, feeling himself in exile there. At the end of 1937, he was glad to leave the place for another job as assistant editor of a fuel oil trade journal. After just a few months, however, de Camp's new job was terminated in an economy measure, and he found himself out of work.

Campbell's need and de Camp's need came together. In very short order de Camp would be a free-lance writer living in New York City, producing stories and essays for John Campbell.

It didn't take Campbell long to see that de Camp had a highly-developed sense of a universe of interconnection, a universe in which all things hang together. And Campbell was able to recognize this as the same in essence as the universe of his own vision—the universe of underlying operating principles.

De Camp became Campbell's right hand man. In 1938, Campbell would publish only three short stories and one article by de Camp. But in 1939, the figures would be two two-part articles, two novels, and six stories, and Campbell would also use de Camp as a script doctor to do a complete revision of another author's not-quite-acceptable novel.

It would be hard to overstate the value that de Camp held for Campbell in those early years. It was a complex and interrelated program of change that Campbell was attempting to engineer in

Asiomatics through 1938 and 1939, and the writing that best exemplified the modern science fiction that Campbell was striving to bring into being was the work of L. Sprague de Camp. Until other writers finally showed up with their own versions of the new Atomic Age vision, it was de Camp who served as Campbell's corroboration and proof.

We might think of Campbell as an architect designing and erecting a mighty building—a house of many mansions—within the conceptual space over which E. E. Smith had spread his tent during the Thirties, rendering formal and permanent what had previously been improvised and temporary. And the articles and stories that L. Sprague de Camp contributed to Campbell in 1938 and 1939 were the first pillar of this edifice.

In this work, de Camp set out to answer the evolutionary conundrum that had so baffled and dismayed the Age of Technology: Why was the true position of man within the universe?

To the Techno Age, it had seemed pretty evident that the universe had no liking and little tolerance for man in his present form. It appeared that if man was to survive, he must evolve. If he did not, then he would certainly be subject to supersession by more nimble Earthly creatures like octopuses or ants, or to subjugation by more ruthless and advanced beings sweeping in from the reaches of time and space. But if man were to evolve—into the alien and monstrous Big Brain, say—would that not come at the complete cost of his precious humanity?

This was the puzzle that de Camp was attempting to challenge and answer. He aimed to make a natural place for humanity with the universe by redefining "man" and "universe" and "evolution," and the connections between them, in the new terms of the Atomic Age vision.

For de Camp there was no longer a radical split between the Village and the World Beyond the Hill. No more was there a safe and tidy here-and-now that was completely known, completely controlled and totally rational, which then stood in contrast to a wild and unfathomable out-there in which all familiar rules were suspended and anything at all might happen.

In de Camp's writing, the universe was presented as a continuum, everywhere partly known, everywhere holding surprise. This may be seen in the articles that de Camp contributed to *Asiomatics*. Here he was at pains to demonstrate the familiarity that might be inherent in the strange and different—and also to show the difference that could lurk within the accepted and familiar.

That something as seemingly fixed and familiar as the language we speak and write and read might become strange to us was asserted in "Language for Time Travelers" (*Asiomatics*, July 1938), the initial article that de Camp would contribute to Campbell. Here he pointed out that our own English language that we take for granted as stable and constant, in actual fact changes and evolves continually through time.

And the complementary thought, that even the most apparently alien of beings might actually prove to be familiar and comprehensible to us, was expressed in his next article, "Design for Life" (*Asiomatics*, May/June 1939), in which de Camp discussed the form that intelligent life must necessarily take from an engineering point-of-view. He came to the conclusion that "if intelligent life did develop on another planet, it is unlikely that it would look like a chrysanthemum, or a starfish, or a fire hydrant. There are good reasons for thinking that it would probably look something like a man."

The effect of these articles—and de Camp's next essay, "There Ain't No Such" (*Asiomatics*, Nov.-Dec. 1939), which discussed earthly creatures as bizarre in appearance and habit as any alien being imagined by SF—was to suggest that the universe was of a common piece, that man was not out of place in the universe, and that evolution was not altogether strange and other, but was an everyday process of small increments of change in which mankind might already be participating without even being aware of it.

In the proto-ecological universe projected by de Camp, to be human was not some exclusive privilege of *Homo sapiens*—the special result of our possession or a rational soul and a personal relationship with God—but rather was a national state of being which we might share with a wide variety of creatures. So it was that invading aliens in de Camp stories like "Divide and Rule" (*Unknown*, Apr.-May 1939) or "The Warrior Race" (*Asiomatics*, Oct. 1940) might fancy themselves to be innately superior to us, but then reveal what might be termed all-too-human frailty. Conversely, de Camp was capable of imagining what

previously would have been thought of as lesser beings—a black bear experimentally raised to high intelligence in "The Command" (*Asiomatics*, Oct. 1938), a Neanderthal man surviving into the present day in "The Grizzly Man" (*Unknown*, June 1939), and a tribe of mutated baboons in "The Blue Graffe" (*Asiomatics*, Aug. 1939)—and of portraying all of them as beings as decent, rational and civilized as most men manage to be, and maybe even a bit more so.

De Camp was perfectly willing to concede that men of our own kind might all run afoul of the forces of evolution and pass from the scene. But if that were to happen, it would not be because evolution was some hostile outside force single-mindedly bent on bringing us down, but because we were so careless, stupid and greedy that we tripped ourselves up.

This may be seen in the short story "Living Fossil" (*Asiomatics*, Feb. 1939). Here, the intelligent 150-pound capuchin monkeys who have succeeded a devolved and nearly extinct mankind suggest that our fall came to pass not through the operation of some iron law of growth and decay, but rather as the result of a multiplicity of human failings, not the least of which was the abuse of the environment. As a monkey scientist puts it:

"We know that Man, during the period of his civilization, was prodigally wasteful of his resources. The exhaustion of the mineral oils is an example. And the world-wide extinction of the larger mammals at the close of the last ice age was probably his doing, at least in part. We're sure that he was responsible for wiping out all the larger species of whales, and we suspect that he also killed off all but two of the twenty or more species of elephant that abounded at that time. Most of the large mammals of today have evolved in the last few million years from forms that were small enough to sit in your hand in Man's time."

"We don't know just why he became extinct, or almost extinct. Perhaps a combination of war and disease did it. Perhaps the exhaustion of his resources had a share. You know what a haribolled material I am in most things; but it always has seemed to me that it was a case of outraged nature taking its revenge. That's not rational, but it's the way I feel. And I've dedicated my life to seeing that we don't make the same mistake."

But for de Camp, mankind was by no means inevitably doomed. There was an obvious way forward, and that was for us to embrace nature, and not to rebel against it.

As early as his first story for Campbell, "Hyperliposity" (*Asiomatics*, Apr. 1938), de Camp imagined a near-future world in which humanity has encountered a virus and suddenly sprouted fur. In Techno Age SF, human change of almost any kind had been perceived as inherently dangerous and destabilizing, the herald of coming decay. For those with this attitude, the growth of fur on human beings must be taken as a hideous sign of degeneration into animality.

Not so for de Camp, the dedicated debunker of Techno Age illusions. For him, fur on human beings was only a superficial change—something to laugh about, but nothing to get worked up over. Rather than resistance and denial, the course recommended by de Camp was adaptation to circumstances. In his story, the person who ultimately prospers in the new furry society is not the man who buys stock in hair-remover, but rather the man who invests in curryscent.

In sum, the answer that de Camp presented to the evolutionary conundrum of the Techno Age in his early writing was this: The universe was not to be feared as fundamentally hostile and other. We ourselves were a natural product of that universe, so that even though we might discover much there that was strange to us, nothing that we would encounter was likely to be wholly alien. If we kept calm, used our science to learn the rules of the universe, and did what was appropriate at each turn, we could get along.

Here in de Camp's work was essentially the same message as the message of "Who Goes There?," but laid out as a complete carefully-marked argument without the vestiges of horror and hysteria that had marked Campbell's story.

The science fiction short stories and the science articles that de

Camp wrote during 1938 and 1939 helped to replace Techno Age emotionalism with a new tone of rationality and good humor. They made a strong case for the legitimacy, value and power of human nature. And they tended to suggest that immediate human survival and advancement would not come by way of evolution, which was a slow, gradual, long-term process that could be trusted to take care of itself, but rather through scientific progress, the cumulative mastery of universal operating principles.

Useful, even essential, as this early work was, however, it would not be de Camp's most original and significant contribution to Campbell's enterprise. This would come in the novels and short novels that he began to write both alone and collaboratively for *Unknown*, the new companion magazine of *Asiomatic*.

This second magazine, which started publication in March 1939, was the true measure of John Campbell's breadth and subtlety. It was the culmination of Campbell's early editorial experiments with SF form and content.

Unknown would be to *Asiomatic* something of what *All-Story* had been to *Argosy*—a less dignified, less responsible and less respectable sibling. A place for SF writers to have some fun without being held to strict account for it.

In outward appearance, *Unknown* would seem not to be a magazine of science fiction at all—at least not science fiction as Hugo Gernsback might reckon it. Instead, it presented itself as a magazine of traditional fantasy printing stories about gods, witches, genies, devils and gnomes.

But this appearance would be deceiving. To the degree that the fiction printed in *Unknown* might honestly be called a kind of fantasy, it was fantasy written as though it were a variant form of modern science fiction. The "magic" in *Unknown* would not be based upon spirit, as in traditional myth. Instead, it would come to be regarded as another kind of science, the result of the operation of alternative underlying operating principles—which L. Sprague de Camp and his collaborator Fletcher Pratt would call "the laws of magic."

In fact, many of the stories published in *Unknown* would bear little or no resemblance of any kind to traditional spirit-based fantasy. Rather, they would be contemporary SF stories with some impossible twist or odd assumption.

When Campbell received a good story that did not observe the strict parameters of plausibility and subject matter that he was attempting to establish in *Asiomatic*, it was highly convenient for him to be able to term the story "fantasy" and print it in *Unknown*. The tale usually told about the way that *Unknown* came into being is that John Campbell had a novel submitted by British writer Eric Frank Russell concerning scientifically unexplained "Forteana phenomena." Under Harry Bates or F. Orlin Tremaine, this story, *Sinister Barrier*, would have fit right into *Asiomatic*, but not under Campbell. So he dreamed up *Unknown* just to contain it.

L. Ron Hubbard would have another story. There can be no doubt that with three Arabian Nights otherworld adventure novels in *Unknown* in 1939, he was the contributor to the magazine whom Campbell initially most depended upon. Late in his life, Hubbard would make the suggestion that it was for his own personal benefit that Campbell invented *Unknown*, since he was more comfortable writing fantasy than science fiction.

At best, however, both stories are only partial truths. Campbell himself said about *Sinister Barrier*: "I can assure you that one does not start a new magazine because of the arrival of any one story alone." And he also said: "One of the things that led to the launching of *Unknown* ... was the fact that more first-rate manuscripts than *Asiomatic* could publish were coming into the office."

Since Campbell was drawing from a common pool of manuscripts, there might at times appear to be a certain degree of arbitrariness in his decisions as to just what story would appear in which magazine. At least some of the stories that he published—de Camp's invading alien story "Divide and Rule," for instance—might as easily have appeared in one place as the other.

But, in Campbell's mind, there was an essential formal distinction between his two magazines. And to aid his writers in their conceptions, he would tell them explicitly: "I edit two magazines, *Asiomatic* and *Unknown*. For *Asiomatic* I want stories which are good and logical

and possible. For *Unknown*, I want stories which are good and logical."

What this meant in practice was that the special business of *Asiomatic* was stories of the future and outer space—the mainstream of science fiction possibility. And the province of *Unknown* was variant realities.

Within the context of the times, it was *Asiomatic* that was the vastly more important magazine. *Asiomatic* was engaged in the serious business of bringing the future of man into being. *Unknown* was just fun and games.

But beyond the immediate moment, *Unknown*—which would only last for four years and thirty-nine issues—would have a very considerable importance of its own. In *Unknown*, a basis would be made for perceiving traditional fantasy and pulp magazine science fiction as being different aspects of a larger SF. And, as the first presentation of SF not just as a literature of change, but of alternate possibilities, *Unknown* would be a portent of coming things in SF just as surely as *The Steam Man of the Prairies* (1868) had once been a forerunner of *The Time Machine* (1895) and *The Skylark of Space* (1928).

Of all Campbell's writers, it was L. Sprague de Camp who found the freedom of *Unknown* most necessary and most congenial. De Camp suffered from one great inhibition in producing stories for *Asiomatic*—the "science fiction" published in *Asiomatic* was supposed to be possible, and the rational side of de Camp took this injunction with the utmost seriousness. But this meant that de Camp was not able to write about either time machines or faster-than-light travel, since in his scientific heart-of-hearts he didn't believe that either of these irrational modes of travel would ever be possible.

"Way back in *The Skylark of Space*, E. E. Smith might have his ventures casually dismiss Einstein and zoom away toward the stars at supra-light speed, saying, 'Einstein's Theory is still a theory. This distance is an observed fact.' " But de Camp, the new Atomic Age man of reason, debunker of Techno Age credulity, was utterly incapable of this sort of imaginative recklessness.

And because he couldn't see how to leap lightly from here to there, de Camp was never fully at home writing about either the future or outer space. His strict imaginative scruples kept his science fiction stories in *Asiomatic* comparatively limited and Earthbound.

Ah, but for de Camp, stories thought of as "fantasy" and written for *Unknown* were crucially different than stories of "science fiction" meant for *Asiomatic*. Stories for *Unknown* were not expected to be possible—and this set de Camp's imagination free.

As one example, operating according to the standards of *Asiomatic*, de Camp would never have been able to imagine "The Grizzly Man," his story of a prehistoric man coping easily with the challenges of the modern world. By what possible means, pray tell, might a Neanderthal man survive for 50,000 years, never aging? Certainly none that de Camp the rational man of science knew. But writing in the context of *Unknown*, he was permitted to posit that his prehistoric bison hunter had been physiologically altered by a (purely conventional) stroke of lightning, and then get on with the pure fun of imagining how modern people might react to him, and he to them.

Unknown gave de Camp a license to take great leaps of the imagination—which he was then expected to develop logically and rigorously. John Campbell couldn't have devised an imaginative formula that was more perfectly suited to the nature and knowledge of this particular writer.

So it was, then, that in a story like *Last Darkness Fall* (*Unknown*, Dec. 1939), the de Camp who could not in all good conscience write about science-fiction time machines felt free to assume yet another lightning-bolt-of-convenience—"the granddaddy of all lightning flashes"—as a device to send his protagonist, archaeologist Martin Padway, back in time to a crucial moment in Western history, the final fall of Rome. Then, from that point, de Camp could play the game of what if/and proceed to write a novel about the application of universal operating principles to the needs of an earlier moment and the transplantation of scientific progress into the past.

It was *Last Darkness Fall* that firmly established L. Sprague de Camp as the star writer of *Unknown*. The obvious model for this story was Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). *Last Darkness Fall* might be thought of as an attempt to take A

Read This

Recently Read and Recommended by Terence M. Green:

Where I'm Calling From by Raymond Carver, (Vintage Books), \$8.95 trade pb. Raymond Carver died last year. He isn't going to write anymore, and that's the tragedy. This book, a compendium of 37 of his incredible short stories, stunningly illustrates why he was one of the finest practitioners of the short story, ever. Stories like "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," "A Serious Talk," "Boxes," "Pever," and "Elephant," are all simple in outline, deep in impact. They are about people living our modern lives, about the pain and darkness and hope that twists about each and every relationship, about our human foibles. I relished every story. I wish there were more.

Phases of Gravity by Dan Simmons (Bantam Spectra), \$4.50 pb. Simmons is a wonderful writer. This is the second novel of his that I have read (*Song of Kali* was the other), and it assures me that there is a substantial entertaining visionary among us. (If you've never read Simmons's story "The River Styx Runs Upstream," you've also missed one of the most mature horror/fantasy stories published in the field in the last decade.) After reading this book, I'm a confirmed Simmons-watcher. Inner and Outer Space are melded in meta-physics here, in a manner that produces wise fiction of a rare sort.

Another Orphan by John Kessel (one-half of a Tor Double), \$2.95 pb. I read this novella originally when it appeared in *SSSF* back in 1982. Again, it is the maturity of the vision that is so enveloping. The art director has chosen a quite inappropriate cover for this edition—conveying none of the literary import of the story; none of this should surprise veteran of

readers though.) Kessel's story about the advertising man who wakes up in Melville's novel *Moby Dick* is at once absorbing and profound, and held up remarkably to a re-reading seven years later.

Breathing Lessons by Anne Tyler, (Penguin/Viking), \$5.95 pb. *The Accidental Tourist* lady makes her 1989 impact with this story of Ira and Maggie, as they wind their way through Pennsylvania and Maryland after attending the funeral of the husband of a friend. The characters come alive, all idiosyncratically real, as do their minute hopes and aspirations, their failures, and their accommodations. Modern life, in an easily accessible story.

50by by Avery Korman, (Simon & Schuster), hc. The latest novel from the pen of the man who gave us *Kramer vs. Kramer* a decade ago. Like that story, this too is about marital breakup, this time as the age of 50 approaches. And like that story, it is at once glib, totally readable, occasionally wise, and in tune with the times.

The Murder of Frau Schütz by J. Madison Davis, (Walker) \$18.95 hc. This is a first novel by a writer to watch: a mystery set in a German concentration camp in WWII. It is the setting that raises this a notch above the average mystery tale. The very idea of being concerned with a murder in such a holocaustic setting is fraught with irony, and the author tells his tale with skill and insight—both on the level of character and on the level of historical detail.

Connecticut Yankee and do it right—that is, in Atomic Age terms.

In both of these stories, contemporary protagonists are transferred to the past through unlikely accidents. Twain's man is sent back through time as the result of a blow on the head from a crowbar in the hands of a dissident worker, while de Camp's is sent to the past by that hummingbird bolt of lightning. The point of arrival in both cases is Europe in the Sixth Century A. D., the eve of the Dark Ages. And the aim of both of these modern men becomes to alter the past.

But at that point, the two books diverge subtly but significantly. Twain's Boss, Hank Morgan, is a man of the Techno Age, a maker of tools and engines and a superintendent of labor. He's a guy who knows how to build machines and keep men in line. His natural impulse is to take the half-historical, half-legendary world he has entered and whip it into shape. Since it is what he knows how to do, he will make guns and railroads and electric lights and set out to turn Arthurian Britain into a facsimile of Nineteenth Century America whether the yokels and peasants like it or not.

But because the story of King Arthur as we know it simply doesn't go that way, eventually he must be slipped a sleeping draught by Merlin which has the effect of returning him to his own time. In the end, we have to take all that comes between the blow on the head (which comes before the beginning of the narrative proper) and the sleeping potion at the end as some sort of dream or hallucination.

De Camp, however, was the active beneficiary of all the stories of travel in time and dimension written in the fifty years since *A Connecticut Yankee*—even though he himself might as well as write time machines of nickel and ivory and crystal as scientifically impossible. And, at the very outset of *Last Darkness Fall*, before the crucial bolt of lightning strikes, he has an Italian professor set forth a very Wells-like theory of time as a tree with many branches:

"I was saying all these people who just disappear, they have slipped back down the . . . trunk of the tree of time. When they stop slipping, they are back in some former time. But as

soon as they do anything, they change all subsequent history. . . . The trunk continues to exist. But a new branch starts out where they came to rest."

Thus, pure device of convenience though that stroke of lightning may be, we do have a basis of argument for taking it seriously as a time travel device. And when Martin Padway finds himself transferred to a known historical period—a declining Rome in 535 A. D., ruled by an Ostrogothic king and about to suffer invasion by Justinian's brilliant general, Belisarius—it isn't a dream and he isn't going to just as suddenly find himself back in the Twentieth Century again. He's in Rome for real, and he's there for good.

What is more, he isn't condemned to complete futility by what our history books say did happen then. He has some assurance that by the actions he chooses to take, he can alter the course of history. It is within his power to create a whole new reality if he is clever and able enough.

Unlike Twain's Techno Age Boss, who perceives the Sixth Century Britons as no better than children or animals, Martin Padway is an Atomic Age democrat who sincerely likes and respects the people he has fallen among. De Camp being de Camp, these various Italians, Goths, Vandals, Syrians, Jews, Greeks and such are presented as familiar, normal, decent, fallible human beings not very different in nature from ourselves.

What distinguishes Padway from them is not that he is some sort of superior human being, higher on the evolutionary ladder than they, but rather his comparatively greater degree of knowledge and objectivity. He is forearmed by knowing something of history as it would have been without him. And he is also a man of scientific training, an heir of the past few centuries of Western scientific progress.

Padway's impulse isn't to attempt to recreate the Twentieth Century in Sixth Century Rome, erecting skyscrapers beside the Colosseum. Indeed, he doesn't for an instant believe that such a thing would be possible. But he is deeply aware of the pivotal nature of the moment in which he finds himself.

He was living in the twilight of western classical civilization. The Age of Faith, better known as the Dark Ages, was closing down. Europe would be in darkness, from a scientific and technological aspect, for nearly a thousand years. That aspect was, to Padway's naturally prejudiced mind, the most, if not the only, important aspect of a civilization.

Almost inevitably, then, it occurs to Padway to wonder: "Could one man change the course of history to the extent of preventing this interregnum?"

It's as though Padway were some special sort of doctor brought to the bedside of this ailing culture to give it a shot of what it needs the most. That isn't an instant, inappropriate modernity, but rather transplants of appropriate inventions and techniques from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, stuff that may serve to start up the machinery of scientific progress.

So it is that Padway introduces Arabic numerals, horse harnesses, distilling, the telescope, semaphore telegraphy, paper and printing, a postal system and schools. When he proposes this last, he says frankly, "I'm going to try to have things taught that really matter: mathematics, and the sciences, and medicine. I see where I shall have to write all the textbooks myself."

Of necessity—there is that invasion by the armies of the Eastern Roman Emperor Justinian to consider—Padway does become involved in military and political activities like Twain's Hank Morgan, but he sees these only as means. He says, "The end is things like the telegraph and the presses. My policking and soldiering may not make any difference a hundred years from now, but the other things will, I hope."

And by the end of the story, he has grown convinced that he has been successful. Whatever befalls him, these things he has introduced are now too widespread and well-rooted to disappear. History has been changed. Darkness will not fill—at least not on this one new branch of the tree of time.

What a triumph for the power of universal operating principles! To overturn the primary example of cyclical history—the decline and fall of the Roman Empire—and replace the Dark Ages with a new era of scientific progress!

De Camp would take the implied argument of *Lost Darkness Fall* and give it explicit expression in the fourth of his influential articles for Campbell, "The Science of Whithering" (*Asiomatic*, July-Aug. 1940). In this essay, de Camp examined one theory of civilization after another, including Oswald Spengler's and Arnold Toynbee's great expositions of cyclical history. But de Camp would come to the conclusion that cyclical history was not after all a grim inevitability for mid-Twentieth Century Western civilization. It might be overturned by the more effective power of modern scientific and technological development.

The transition from Techno Age SF to the new modern science fiction of the Atomic Age reached its turning point in the summer of 1939, at just about the same time that de Camp was turning his primary attention from *Asiomatic* to *Unknown*. It was then that John Campbell's patient efforts to alter *Asiomatic* and to change SF began to come together and take on a synergetic power.

By that time, Campbell had overhauled *Asiomatic* inside and out. It no longer presented the same face to the world. It had a revised title, new design, and new cover artists.

The content of the magazine had gradually altered along with its outward appearance. In the pages of *Asiomatic*, Campbell had announced and defined a new kind of science fiction, and published examples by himself and others. And he had discovered or developed a nucleus of writers capable of producing this new SF.

Campbell had given science fiction readers and writers a new humanized universe to consider: A universe that was not hostile to mankind. A universe in which human decision and human action counted. A universe that human beings might even come to control.

And in editorials, in articles and in fiction, Campbell had set forth a new agenda of major projects for the modern science fiction writers of *Asiomatic* to concentrate their attention on—tests of this new universe. These central problems would be the essence of the Golden Age *Asiomatic* learning to cope with the complexities of future living, developing space travel, controlling atomic power and the robot, and

exploring the limits of the human mind. If men could learn to handle these operations, then surely they could master anything the universe had to offer.

Finally, Campbell had created the modern fantasy of *Unknown* as an obvious contrast to the new science fiction of *Asiomatic*. But also as a less obvious reinforcement and extension of the methods and values of *Asiomatic*.

And even so—through the first half of 1939, *Asiomatic* was not yet a magazine of modern science fiction, but still only striving to be one.

But then, in the summer of 1939, this condition visibly began to alter. In the space of just three months—July, August, and September—a host of new writers appeared for the first time in Campbell's magazines, lured to him by the message of the changes in *Asiomatic*, by the sound and smell of action, or by the simple force of Campbell's need for them.

The July 1939 issue of *Asiomatic* marks the sunrise of the Campbell Golden Age. This was the first issue in which the preponderance of material was in the new style:

Campbell's editorial was a follow-up to the news that the atom had been split. He foresaw both commercial atomic power plants and the explosive potential of rapid fission, noting, "For sheer violence, the fission of the uranium atom is unmatched."

There were two articles in July. One was "Tools for Brains" by Leo Vernon, a history of the development of thinking machines. The other, "Geography for Time Travelers" by Willy Ley—which owed something to L. Sprague de Camp's previous article, "Language for Time Travelers"—pointed out that even the shape and location of continents are subject to change.

In this issue, the cover story was "Black Destroyer," a novelet by a Canadian named A. E. van Vogt, who had been stimulated to take up SF writing by an impulsive newspaper reading of "Who Goes There?"

Also here was "Trends," the first story in *Asiomatic* by young Isaac Asimov, the eager kid from the candy store whom Campbell had been tutoring for the past year.

Nor was that the end of the riches. Also in this July issue was a striking novelet of alternate futures, "Greater Than Gods," the first story for Campbell by C. L. Moore, the author of "Shambleau" and the Jirel of Joire stories. Not only would Moore contribute a number of distinguished stories to Campbell under her own name, but after her marriage to Henry Kuttner in 1940, they would jointly become two of Campbell's most effective new wartime writers, "Lewis Padgett" and "Lawrence O'Donnell."

And there were more new writers to come. In the August issue of *Asiomatic*, there appeared "Life-Line," the first SF story by former navy officer Robert Heinlein. He would become two major writers for Campbell: himself and "Anson MacDonald."

And still more. In the August *Unknown* there was "Two Sought Adventure," a first novelet by Fritz Leiber, Jr., the son of a well-known Shakespearean actor. And the September *Asiomatic* contained "Ether Breather," the first SF story by young merchant seaman Theodore Sturgeon.

It was this horde of new writers so suddenly arrived—together with E. E. Smith, Jack Williamson, Clifford Simak, L. Ron Hubbard, Lester del Rey and L. Sprague de Camp—who would be the makers of John Campbell's Golden Age, the builders of his empire of the imagination.

The most central of these would be de Camp, Asimov, Heinlein and van Vogt. It would be they who would take universal operating principles and apply them to other dimensions, to the robot, to time, to space, and to the higher evolution of man. ▴

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Screed

(Letters of Comment)

James Gunn, Lawrence, Kansas

I didn't think I would be writing again so soon, but the June issue of the *Review* arrived, and my name and opinions are featured so prominently in Patrick Murphy's article on "Gender Politics" that I thought I should respond. I do so with trepidation, hoping that I can make clear that I am not discussing feminism but the article about it.

Critical approaches are as valuable as the insights they provide, and different approaches provide different insights, none inherently superior to another. Problems arise when they produce misreadings, either through the approach itself or through the commitment of the critic to the approach. Thus Murphy misreads the phrase about Vonda McIntyre's *Dreamsnake*: "It is feminist but not polemical, like McIntyre's *Superluminal*." The presence of the comma changes the meaning to the opposite of what Murphy reads. In similar fashion, Murphy terms pejorative the word "polemical" used here and in describing Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* and later work. My Webster's International defines "polemic" as "Of the nature of, pertaining to, or involving an aggressive attack on, or refutation of, other's opinions, doctrines, or the like. . . ." The term, it seems to me, is descriptive rather than pejorative; Murphy's objection is not that the term isn't appropriate but his feeling that I disapprove of the work. I notice that in the same issue Kathryn Cramer uses the term to refer to the anthology work of Judith Merrill, and not, I gather, pejoratively.

Murphy even suggests that I have no right to the opinion that subtlety is superior to blatancy, that it may be a more effective strategy to get the reader's assent to a proposition before revealing what the proposition really involves. Whether or not I hold that opinion is irrelevant; any strategy is fully as defensible as the other, and has nothing to do with goals. The evidence lies in the inclusion of feminist writers in my anthologies, the discussion of the issues they deal with, and their listings in my "Basic Science Fiction Library."

If I don't list as many as Murphy would like, or in the way he would like, it may be because he doesn't read the reasons for the list carefully either. This was a list, published most recently in the November 15 issue of *Library Journal*, based on a list prepared by a committee of SFWA, written up by Alexei Panshin, and published in June 15, 1970, *Library Journal*. I modified it and expanded it and published it first as an appendix to *The Road to Science Fiction #1: From Gilgamesh to Wells in 1977*. My list was intended to suggest a basic background for the teacher of science fiction, that is, what the teacher should have read before going on to other reading and teaching. Murphy claims that *Herland* is more often read on college campuses than *She*; whether that is true or not, that wasn't the question I was concerned with, but whether *Herland* or *She* was more often read at the time of publication and more influential on the development of science fiction. Which is more important to a reading and understanding of science fiction? Let those who want a different history of SF come up with their own lists and their own rationales.

Finally, Murphy claims that I slighted Russ by not mentioning her short fiction awards, but he didn't read the list carefully enough to note that this was a list of books and the only time I mentioned any short fiction awards involved the title story of a collection and two previous versions of an award-winning novel.

But the most frightening aspect of the entire article is the absence of scholarly qualification and the tone of cold certainty throughout—as if the critical issues have been settled and debate is no longer permissible. The critic, like the scientist, needs humility as well as accuracy of observation, the realization that one may be wrong, and a method for proving theories false. They may not make for good polemics, but they do make for good criticism.

Jerry Kaufman, Seattle, Washington:

Your "Self-Analysis" in Number Ten punched a bunch of buttons, apparently, and I am loaded with a number of corrections, exceptions and objections. I'm afraid that you don't seem to know what you're talking about when it comes to fannzines, semi-prozines, Hugos or trufans.

While it might be true that trufans don't think zines about sf are fannzines, what does that have to do with the Hugos? If trufans nominated in large enough numbers and with any unity of taste, you might see *Lipor Pulpur* or *Trapdoor* or even *Mainstream* on the ballot, not the zines that are there contradicting your thrust. . . . what with *Lan's Lantern* being almost entirely about sf with reviews and articles and even whole issues devoted to Arthur C. Clarke; or *Niekas*, a fat collection of quasi-academic articles about sf; or *Foxfax*, a clubzine that prides itself on being about sf and not that boring Lannish stuff. *File 770* is certainly not full of reviews (not even of fannzines) because it's too busy reporting on conventions and interviewing Algis Budrys. The only zine I've never encountered is *OtherReams*; unreliable sources tell me it's also full of reviews and sf-related material.

In fact, it looks like it's no longer possible for a fannzine that's not a newzine or about sf in some direct to be nominated for the Hugo. The nominees and winners of the last few years are strong evidence of this. That's why trufans started *Corflu* (which doesn't have awards at all). Most of them still read sf, despite anecdotal evidence to the contrary, but they read *NYRSF* or *Metaphysical Review* or *Foundation* if they want to read about sf, and they go to sf conventions if they want to talk about it. They don't go to *Corflu* to hear writers' gossip; they go to hear fan gossip. They don't go to discuss Mike Bishop's latest opus; they talk about Mike Ashley's. (Say, that's not true, says someone; I know, says I. I'm exaggerating to make a point. Are you?)

So what about all those fannzines you mentioned in your first paragraph, the ones in whose traditions you take part. First of all, I dispute their claims to be fannzines. The only one I will admit into the field is *Cheap Truth* because it was truly a labor of love all around. It was free, took no advertising, etc. It came for postage, for trade, for an equally energetic response, it came for a whim of editor or writer or reader. And it didn't trade on great or famous names, since most (including the editor) were pseudonyms, just to bring up another point in its favor. Second, I dispute that they form a tradition. I think they're part of a recent fad.

This leads to some measures of fannishness, some criteria for a fannzine, that aren't addressed in the Hugo rules. Some of them are pretty subjective, but that's one of the great beauties of the fannzine: subjectivity. You can't really tell a fannzine editor what should be in his/her fannzine to make it legitimate. That's one thing: contents are the choice of an editor. Another is that fannzines are available for *The Usual*. To some people, this constitutes the whole definition of a fannzine. Money is definitely the last on the list of possibilities, not the first. Next is the lettercol. Letters are the bloodcells in the bloodstream of fandom, tying each issue to the previous one, and to all the other fannzines out there. (Actually, my favorite metaphor for the fannzine community is gift-exchange.) Another very subjective measure is the sense of a community among the contributors; even if the readers don't know all the contributors, or any, the fannzine implies that they all know one another somehow. (I don't think this is something that's often explicitly pointed out, but it's a strong factor nonetheless.)

NYRSF meets some of these criteria slightly, misses out on others entirely. You don't feel like a community, but like a few friends and a lot of scattered writers and academics trying to earn Winter Scout badges. You aren't available for anything but cash. You run hardly any letters. You wing your hands over the poor misguided trufans who don't publish the right stuff about *The Right Stuff*, and who nominate you in the wrong category. (It's a tough category, too; *Locus* always wins. Of course, that's why it was invented. Without it, *Locus* would still be winning all the Fanzine Hugos.)

By the way, if I really thought Patrick was trying to design *NYRSF* to agree with "this opinions as to how a fannzine ought to look," I'd send him a free refresher in the Famous Fanneds School, Layout 101, where they use Redd Boggs and Patrick Nielsen-Hayden fannzines as Perfect Examples. His layout for *NYRSF* is obviously meant to make it look like anything but a fannzine. And you should be glad! Don't try

to be something you're not. Be what you are: *Nerfuss*, the best sf review magazine published in New York.

A. J. Budrys, Los Angeles, California

It may seem late to comment on a feature of Issue #2, but I've been busy, yet remain perturbed.

My name comes up in Alan C. Elms' review of Russell Miller's unauthorized "biography" of L. Ron Hubbard. (Elms seems to have reached to get it in there.) What disturbs me, as someone who has worked closely with aspects of Hubbard's legacy for over five years, is the readiness of some SF commentators to swallow unexamined almost any negative assertion about the man.

L. Ron Hubbard was and is a prominent feature of the SF landscape. Scholarship founded on the premise that any slander must be valid cannot help but distort our past and the nature of our literature. I expect more from someone with a claim to stature as a researcher in the good traditions of academe.

Miller's book, as a piece of mass-market journalism, possibly doesn't have to come up to those meticulous standards. But it's full of holes as reportage, too. In preparing my introduction to *Final Blackout*, for instance, I reviewed documents and letters that were readily obtainable under the Freedom of Information Act. Miller claims they don't exist because his self-described exhaustive research couldn't find them.

[...]

And one of the two letters to Hubbard published in Perry Chapdelaine's compendium of JWC letters is striking for its "You big boys were in town and didn't invite little me to play with you!" tone. Why hasn't anyone picked up that publicity? Is that because it doesn't fit the way Hubbard's actual "Golden Age" stature has been slighted in just about every biographical reference volume produced after Dianetics appeared?

Then there's this "Cordwainer Smith" thing Elms has brought in. I yield to no man in my admiration for Paul Linebarger's contribution to SF literary technique, but I don't understand how "Smith's" being a teenage insider on China politics in the 1920s has anything to do with L. Ron Hubbard's first-hand study of Oriental philosophies.

What's more notable to me is that since Elms says he's at work on a "Smith" biography, a reader might assume that anything Elms says in this area is impeccable as to fact. When Elms "authenticates" Paul Linebarger's political expertise with a supporting romantic anecdote, one tends to swallow whole Elms' account of Linebarger's tragic and nearly deadly infatuation with an exiled White Russian older woman in China. "Narrowly survived a suicide pact with her," Elms reports. But look at these facts:

After having left China—that is, soon after this harrowing crisis—Paul Linebarger matriculated at George Washington University and in his nineteenth year became editor of the literary supplement to the *University Hatchet*, GWU's student newspaper. In its May 24, 1932, issue, Linebarger published the prize-winning work in the *Hatchet's* recently concluded one-act play competition. That play is by a fellow student named L. Ron Hubbard. That play is about a passionate and perilous romance with an exiled White Russian woman in China, etc., etc.

I've read the play—it's among the resources of the L. Ron Hubbard biographers. Its fictional scenario contains almost all of the features Elms ascribes to a Linebarger real-life affair. (One has to assume he's found something about it in Linebarger's diaries. Unless he's relying entirely on the un-named other "member of the literary supplement's staff" he cites as a source. Was this individual simply recounting recollections of 1932, or was a contemporaneous journal kept? How actually supportable is Elms' entire series of assertions about how Linebarger and Hubbard got along fifty-seven years ago?)

What accounts for the central coincidence? Why is Paul Linebarger reported to have suffered an emotional trauma stemming from experiences that so closely parallel the scenario of L. Ron Hubbard's *Hatchet* prize-winning work of fiction? How did Linebarger feel about publishing the play? Preparing it for the press should have poignantly affected Linebarger's doubtless quite proximate recollections of his teenage angst. I think Elms would have mentioned finding some reference to such a thing about the play in Linebarger's personal journals, if not from some other source. Citing it would have

added considerable tone to Elms' circumstantial vignette on incidents in the asserted Linebarger/Hubbard "rivalry" at GWU, wouldn't you think?

What accounts for the total absence of any such major contretemps from the record of Linebarger's GWU undergraduate life according to biographer Elms? Didn't Elms know about the play? Hasn't he examined all numbers of the *Hatchet* supplement edited by Linebarger?

Elms' kind of hearsay "review" of a book like the Miller book is dangerous to the truth. It was shortly after I published a gratuitous comment on Hubbard in *Northwestern U's* literary magazine that I grabbed myself by the scruff of the neck and said "Hey, what do you really know about this?" And went and looked. I recommend that.

There is wisdom yet to be received on this topic. L. Ron Hubbard was a highly remarkable individual, and Scientology is only one of a number of well-organized, flourishing things he created. It's absurd to claim he "couldn't have done" some thing or another just because it seems unlikely by standards applicable to people who haven't accomplished much.

It appears to me that shortly after having taken on the purely professional assignment of writing this SF stuff, he was drawn deep into speculative literature by some intrinsic aspect of it (whereas Arthur J. Burks, his contemporary, did only a perfunctory job). This involvement appears to have fueled an extraordinary production of stories, many of which are still showing high impact on the audience.

And he is only one of a number of prominent SF practitioners who was fascinated by what are often classified as "religious matters." Vide Heinlein, Herbert, Clarke, Sturgeon, the crypto-Calvinist Campbell et al. in our time. I think there's something indicative, too, in the scurrilous ferocity with which the otherwise thoughtful C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton and the other religious "inklings" slandered and attempted to pillory H. G. Wells beyond all reason. There is something profoundly emotional going on here that needs examination.

There appears to be something in the warp and woof of SF that is fundamentally connected to this whole question, pro and con religion. We are not going to find it as soon as we could, or as surely as we could, if we just repeat "what everybody knows," relay the glib asseverations of cash-in "biographers," and retail undocumented anecdotes. I see it as a profound error to try to make the most prominent instance in our history not have happened, or not have meant anything, or, please, not require any thought.

I am, in fact, pretty sure that what so deeply disturbs a few SF people about Hubbard is that he claimed to have found what they want to keep looking for . . . and not only that he claimed it, but that he hasn't gone away, and it hasn't gone away. More of our thoughtful people should be looking at this.

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Work in Progress

A Bibliographic Checklist of First Editions, by L. W. Currey

Draft: Revised 10/88

BRUCE STERLING

b. 1954

THE ARTIFICIAL KID. *New York Cambridge London Hagers-town Mexico City Philadelphia Sao Paulo San Francisco Sydney: Harper & Row, Publishers, [1980].*
Boards with cloth shelf back. First edition/.../80 81 82 83 84 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 on copyright page.

INVOLUTION OCEAN. [New York: A Jove/HBJ Book, [1977].
Wrappers. First Jove/HBJ edition published January 1977 on copyright page. A Jove Book A4301 (\$1.50).

ISLANDS IN THE NET. *New York: Arbor House / William Morrow, [1988].*
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SCHISMATRIX. *New York: Arbor House, [1985].*
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Edited Fiction:

Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology. *New York: Arbor House, [1986].*
Boards. First printing has code 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 on copyright page. Edited, with preface, notes and two stories "Red Star, Winter Orbit" (with William Gibson) and "Mozart in Mirrorshades" (with Lewis Shiner), by Sterling.

Compiled 10/88

TOM REAMY

(1935-1977)

BLIND VOICES. *New York: Published by Berkley Publishing Corporation Distributed by G. P. Putnam's Sons, [1978].*
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SAN DIEGO LIGHTFOOT SUE AND OTHER STORIES. *Kansas City: Earthlight Publishers, [1979].*

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On the Other Hand...

As strange as it feels to be rebutting one of our editorials, I have to disagree with last issue's editorial statement on "Workshops and Workshopping," the gist of which was that today's sf workshops are guilty of begetting an unhealthy degree of competition between young sf writers (especially those who attended the same workshop) with the effect that such novices were more interested in outwriting and/or publishing their peers than writing up to the standards of (or even paying much attention to) the elder masters of the field. Frankly, I'm not convinced that this dire situation even exists, let alone that Clarions/Milford/Sycamore Hill/Writers of the Future are to blame.

If young writers are competing with their peers, it's because there are only so many markets for talented-but-inexperienced authors, not because of some old classroom rivalries. Craft takes time to learn, and even if some hopeful sets out deliberately to outwrite Samuel Delany, Arthur C. Clarke, Stephen King, Joanna Russ or whomever (choose your own icon), chances are he's going to start out in the back pages of some semi-prozine with the rest of the beginners. Were things different back in the pre-workshop days when today's veterans were struggling to place their trial efforts in a finite number of pulps? I suspect not.

Are the older, more established authors being neglected while the War of the Workshopppers rages on? Judging from the frequency with which they appear in bookstores, convention panels and bestseller lists, it seems not. If the competition for short fiction awards and anthologies seems largely given over to the young, then that's probably because the older authors have moved on to more lucrative six-book contracts and such. On those occasions when a Robert Silverberg (or a Harlan Ellison or an Ursula K. Le Guin) produces a worthy piece of short fiction, the result is usually nominations and awards.

I have no objections to the proposition that we should all aspire to write as well as the best writers of our field, from H. G. Wells on, or that there may have been some individuals who were damaged by the more competitive workshops. But, overall, I still think Clarion and the rest have helped more careers than they've hurt, and that to place the blame on the workshops for a possibly non-existent decline in the standards of modern sf is akin to crying out that penicillin is causing an "epidemic" of allergic reactions.

Basically, any writer of any ambition faces the same dual goals: in the short term, you're writing to get published (or paid, depending on your economic circumstances) in which case, unless you're a real prodigy, you are competing with writers of comparable talent and reputation; in the long term, you are writing for the ages, knowing that you will and should be judged against the very best writers of the past and present. And that's way the situation is likely to remain, workshops or no.

—Greg Cox & the editors

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